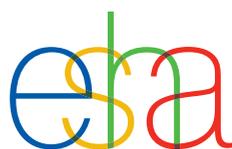




esa magazine

DECEMBER 2020

New Paradigm of School Leadership



European School
Heads Association

COLOPHON

ESHA magazine is the official magazine of the European School Heads Association, the Association for school leaders in Europe. ESHA magazine will be published four times per school year. You are welcome to use articles from the magazine, but we would appreciate it if you contacted the editor first.

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COLUMN ESHA PRESIDENT BARBARA NOVINEC

The post-pandemic era of education should be all-inclusive



It seems the ending months of the year 2020 bring us to the threshold of a developing new reality in many perspectives, some of which we had not considered before the onset of the pandemic period. Therefore, it is not difficult to imagine that these past months have been a challenge for all of the education personnel as well as for other stakeholders in the education process. As the dimension of this unprecedented pandemic crisis has become more widespread than we could have envisaged, the effects have also resulted in the unmasking of many fragile characteristics of the school systems across the world.

It seems that the COVID-19 pandemic has not only disrupted, but also shifted the traditional organisational structures of education environment. The closures of kindergartens and schools and the abrupt transition from face-to-face education to the online kind have definitely had a particularly grave impact on those children and students who come from underprivileged social backgrounds. The realisations of many educators confirm the socio-economic background having a strong correlation with amplified educational inequalities during the

pandemic schooling. Their lack of the IT technology equipment and knowledge as well as limited access to the digital learning are only two of the frequent reasons why these students' well-being and their academic performance has suffered even more than in the pre-pandemic times.

As disadvantaged students had been part of the school systems long before the onset of the pandemic, we realise that the COVID-19 situation has only shed the more severe light on the topic, which we should not only address, but must in fact invest our fullest attention and effort to it. Precisely these students are the ones who need most encouragement that quality education can and should offer. We should never put aside the idea of having equity-based education as a dystopian one, because as educators and educational leaders it is foremost our responsibility to strive for all future human potential to be realised.

While foreseeing the post-pandemic times in terms of changes we will need to reintroduce into the school systems, it is consequently of key importance to provide each child and student with a fair and inclusive opportunity to quality education. Successful education systems are the ones, which combine excellence and equity in their education policies and practices. That is why the growing inequality in education is a worrying fact for the society as a whole. When discussing equitable education as the aim for the future, we may consider that the pandemic itself might make education more equitable if we as educators detect the inequalities early on and are then given the much-needed autonomy to leading educational institutions forward in the post-pandemic era.

If there has ever been the time for joint efforts, this is it. As teachers and school leaders we have also experienced the pandemic effect in its full force, as these extreme times have in the majority of cases shifted our

way of teaching and school leading. Online classrooms and the virtual way of teaching are not the most natural ways of passing on knowledge as much for the technological obstacles as for the lack of direct communication which is the essential fibre of any student-teacher relationship. The third reason, which has undoubtedly left many teachers and school leaders sleepless at night, is the assessment. As much as the latter one is important, it should never be prioritised over the care for the students' health and well-being. Fortunately educators and school leaders have realised this soon enough and have been able to adjust teaching and learning to the changing circumstances.

In order for this to be put into practise even more after the pandemic, we should strive to build education systems on trust and professionalism as only in this way the educators will be given enough flexibility and autonomy to ensure the social and emotional well-being of the students. Provided this will be the case, the quality development of knowledge and even real-life competences will follow suit and this will serve the society as a whole in any future crisis to come. Trust is indeed a word, which only acquires meaning when it becomes a value. In the education environment we are awarded with trust and also need to pass it on to those we set example for, namely our students. It is therefore a given fact that teachers and school leaders should be included into the majority of decisions about the policies, which pertain to the quality of education.

If sustainability is the mind-set of our general future, it should also serve as a guideline in making improvements in our school systems. Above all, we should await the post-pandemic times of education as the united front, considering all stakeholders in education an integral part of its development. In the greatest battles in history, the generals leading the armies often said: "No man should be left behind". This must also be our mission: not to overlook, forget, nor discourage even a single student

while educating many. At all times, but even more importantly at the time of a crisis and afterwards.

As the year 2020 is slowly ending, we have to, despite all the challenges we have overcome in these past months, be grateful for the opportunity to re-evaluate also ourselves on many different levels. With this in mind, I wish you a peaceful and healthy transition into the upcoming year 2021, filled with health, joy and personal happiness to you and your families. ■

Barbara Novinec, ESHA president

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New Paradigm of School Leadership



The pandemic has forced school leaders into unprecedented roles and decision making situations. The ESHA board and office wished to prove that it has resulted in a new paradigm of school leadership and that the lessons learned will be valuable resources to share within the ESHA membership. In order to gather information, the ESHA office has created an online survey for the organisation's members, distributed via direct mailing and social media. 42 responses have been received from headmasters, school managers, and deputy school leaders from 10 countries: Belgium (21), Bulgaria (1), Cyprus (4), Denmark (1), Iceland (6), Ireland (3), Italy (1), Slovenia (2), Catalonia (1), Finland (1). As the number of respondents indicate, half of the school leaders answering the questionnaire are from Belgium.

BY LUCA JANKA LASZLO, ESHA CONSULTANT

School heads were first asked about their biggest difficulties while coping with the changed situation in schools because of the pandemic. The main challenges mentioned were the ever-changing protocols and regulations, and the responsibility of keeping the school community up-to-date and connected, while trying to maintain a positive environment paying attention to the well-being of the staff and students, that had increased workload and level of responsibility on school leaders enormously. Being available all day every day, organizing the logistics of online education or replacing teachers who got infected were all major challenges. In some cases they had no opportunity to meet their staff in person, so they had to lead the school virtually. They had to support the school community to cope with digitalization of teaching and learning as well as coping with often very strict regulations.

It was and still is a difficult time for school leaders but they feel they have learned a lot as leaders from these new experiences. They realized how important it is to be calm, focused, organized, clear, and flexible, as they often felt they had to 'predict the future'. The importance of well-established communication channels to all relevant stakeholders was often highlighted among the respondents, as personal relationships and attention to individual needs still had to be maintained despite the difficult situation. It had been acknowledged that regardless the fact that personal meetings were often not possible, the power of the community remained strong. Despite the emergency conditions, it was important for leaders to also take the time and care about their own wellbeing, although they learned a lot about their own as well as their school communities' resilience. They have familiarised themselves with a plethora of digital tools and solutions and learnt how different communication through them is. It was mentioned that small and clear interventions can help combat fear. They learned to count on and appreciate the creativity of the school community to overcome difficulties.

Several new practices and measures were introduced, and while leaders would be happy to quickly abandon a lot, some had positive effects, and respondents are planning to keep them even if the current safety procedures can be abandoned at last. Forced digitalization was a big challenge in many schools, but at the same time it opened up new possibilities, and many leaders have now realized the importance of investing resources in training school staff better in this field, exploiting the benefits of digital solutions, and continue using technology for communication and education also in the classrooms. Some leaders will pursue blended education. They want to continue counting on their team in creating internal policies. They have learnt to keep meetings as short and efficient as possible. School leaders also plan to maintain close communication with families and strengthen collaboration between families and school staff. Some schools will continue offering distance learning possibilities to those students prevented from coming to school, and pay extra attention to their care. Some school heads will also keep some hygienic measures introduced because of the pandemic.

As mentioned before, school leaders did not only have the responsibility to take care of the logistical issues but also to pay attention to the well-being of their school community, especially their leadership and school staff. They were available, often the listening ear, the shoulder to cry on. They have organized small group meetings, coaching, some used the power of humour, trying to break the stress with tiny surprises, funny videos. They gave positive feedback, tried to minimize the extra workload, and acknowledged the great work their colleagues have done. Some principals were supporting their teachers in the school by setting a good example, keeping a positive attitude, and trusting the professionalism and creativity of their colleagues. They have supported their teachers trying to understand the specifics of new regulations, and figure out solutions to new problems arising from them.



While we cannot go back in time, and try again, respondents were asked in the survey what advice would they give themselves. School leaders wished they could tell themselves to never take anything for granted, to appreciate their team, to care for their own well being, to focus more on what is necessary, to accept that they can only do so much while trusting and staying true to themselves in every decision. They have now realized the importance of planning flexibly for long term and saving their energy, to not rush decisions despite an emergency, but have flexibility and constant reflection as the new normal.

The ESHA office was happy to learn that almost half of the respondents felt that ESHA has supported them as leaders during the pandemic. We have gathered input on how we can help school leaders further, and ESHA will continue sharing inspiring practices, diverse approaches and evidence-based solutions. Find more at the ESHA website: <https://www.esha.org/covid19/> ■

ANNEX: SURVEY QUESTIONS

- What country are you from?
- What is your occupation?
- What did you find the most difficult as a leader during the pandemic?
- What did you learn as a leader during the pandemic?
- What new practices and solutions do you plan to keep after the pandemic?
- How did you support your peers as a leader during the pandemic?
- If you could go back to the time when the pandemic changed our everyday life and give any advice to yourself, what would you say?
- Did ESHA help you in any way as a leader during the pandemic?
- How could ESHA support you better?

The pandemic legacy: Resilient, positive leadership for self and others



Not for decades have schools experienced such an abrupt period of sustained change which has caused us to rethink our work, our values and how we live our lives. Covid has compromised our emotional, physical and financial wellbeing. It is an interesting paradigm that a physical threat has caused so many to rethink their lives bringing about such a strong focus upon their mental health and wellbeing. Across society there is growing consensus that our physical and mental wellbeing must be addressed as one, supporting the whole person. Through Covid, many have experienced a lack in their sense of autonomy to make choices, a lack in their sense of competence to believe they have what it takes and a lack in their sense of connectedness to those who seemed to always just be there for them. For many, these have had a debilitating impact on both their self-determination and motivation.

ROB STOKOE AND MICK WALSH

FACING THE UNKNOWN

On a personal, national and global level we have been forced to react to events which are fast moving. Long-term, well considered planning is no longer the norm in a challenging, fluid 2020. The role of the school leader is deeply complex and intense, the current pandemic has greatly increased both workload and intensification. In the new academic year in schools our staff, pupils and parents will be looking to their leaders to provide for them as never before. To thrive in this context our leaders will need to lead with compassion, encompass authenticity, respectfulness, fairness and commitment to others.

To ensure that we meet these new accountabilities and challenges we need to move forward with a proactive mindset, one which is reactive, preventative and constructive. This will need to be combined with emotionally supportive leadership willing to reach out, to care for and to empower colleagues. Schools willing to accept this challenge will have the opportunity not just to meet the challenges ahead but to improve performance through the empowerment of their staff and learners by offering the right support to the right people at the right time. There is and continues to be growing pressure for school leaders to respond all too quickly to a quagmire of new demands and unforeseen challenges. Our initial response requires two distinct areas of focus: leadership and wellbeing. As ‘you cannot give from an empty cup’ we need to begin with the wellbeing of our school leaders.

But I ask, who will empower our leaders in this herculean task? The answer to that must come from the collective of leaders in forums to support and enable each other. Leadership wellbeing will be the cornerstone to what lies ahead for our school communities.

WE NEED OUR LEADERS TO STAY WELL

The pandemic has brought many two-word slogans such as catch it, bin

it, kill it; or stay home, save lives. We need our educators to 'stay well'. One of my concerns moving forward is for our school leaders. How they react to these extra ordinary events will show their true character as school leaders. Their instincts will be to look after others first and their own needs will be met later. However, they must accept that their well-being is essential if they are to meet the considerable challenges ahead. This road is one none have travelled before and our leaders require both emotional and technical supportive intervention. Self-awareness and being self-compassionate will enable our leaders to gain awareness of and begin to address the difficulties they face. The key is openness, the ability to communicate, to share and to build personal support networks, thus enabling leaders to share achievements and concerns, to re-energise themselves to capably support their learning communities. Leaders need to constantly examine how they are feeling, ensure that they exercise, eat and sleep well. They need to be proactive, to have an attitude of gratitude, looking for opportunities to appreciate the things that make them feel happier, however small. The following may help:

- Reflect upon something that made you smile recently.
- Write down three things you are thankful for.
- Send a hand-written note to a person that you are happy to have in your life.
- Write down what you are looking forward to most for the day ahead, no matter how small.

We cannot expect individual school leaders to naturally possess these new sets of capabilities, ones that have never been expected of them to such a degree. To enable, empower and equip our leaders, their overarching professional associations must step up to support them as a collective. For example, formally creating networks of half a dozen leaders to meet, share, discuss and support each other at least every fortnight. There is no precedent here, no underpinning research base,

just believing in and acting on the premise that the best response to life's up and downs, is collaborating and being with other people. Our school leaders will need their cups filled, in order to give to their students, staff and parents, from the collective pool of leadership collegiality.

This is not a time for espousing theories, it is a time for doing, and bringing the best of human nature together. Tapping into the natural wonders and highs which come from serotonin and oxytocin, which in turn, are only released in our brains, when people come together. To rise to the challenges, school leaders must be provided with both formal and informal opportunities to interact in person, face to face and side by side.

Your choices shape your life, and research has shown, that 40% of your happiness and wellbeing is determined by the choices we make. Positivity is a choice, train yourself to see positivity it is the first step to a happier life. Oscar Wilde once wrote, "the rarest thing in the world is to live, most people merely exist". The very first choice you have is whether you choose to choose, do you choose to choose to live and to lead, or are you pulled along by other people's choices. You have a finite amount of emotional energy and it is important to focus upon the positive things within your control which can make a difference to yourself and others.

SEEK ENGAGEMENT AND INDIVIDUAL HAPPINESS

Leaders have for several months been at the forefront of dealing with and responding to the shifting sands of the pandemic. They have received no respite yet have met every expectation. This combined with an increasingly complex and difficult financial context raises concerns for their wellbeing as they embark upon a new school year unrested. We need to be proactive at the very least to help them deal with anxiety and coping strategies to encourage positive, calm engagement and individual happiness. We need them to be well and upbeat as they are the wellbeing champions in their schools. They need to be able to understand

themselves in order to nurture their own sense of self as well as that of students, staff and their communities. If we can achieve this, we will help individuals across society to embrace and to meet the challenges of the unique circumstances in which we find ourselves in a culture of kindness and openness.

We need to bring a focus to what are leaders are committed to, areas such as Vision and Mission, on what they are trying to accomplish in a timely way. Who needs to be doing what needs to be clear as well as building teams and their skills sets, whilst constantly acknowledging achievement. Clearly opportunities are essential for leaders to discuss their experiences and the challenges they have and continue to face. The crux of this is who is “we”. This is not a time to enlist the busiest person in the world, commonly known as “someone else”. “We” must emerge to enable these necessary tasks and capabilities.

COMPASSIONATE, SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP

In this time of global disruption leaders are being tested in new ways, in a time of initiative overload they need to have the strength and confidence to focus upon what they can control and to leverage the talent at their fingertips. Leaders need to get used to saying the things they are not used to saying such as telling colleagues just how valued they are. To successfully address this pace of change compassionate leadership is required. Direct, purposeful and people orientated leadership identifying the unique challenges their school faces and the skills and resources required to meet them. They will include the following:

- Strategic Agility. Deciding on what you can control, what is achievable, and the skills leaders and middle leaders need to succeed in a fast-changing paradigm.
- Realism: Understanding that we nearly always overestimate what can be achieved in one year, and nearly always underestimate what can

be achieved in three years once we have the processes in place.

- Supportive Insight: Understanding what is happening, helping staff through it, recognising their efforts and supporting their wellbeing.
- Inspiring Others. Finding the best ways to support, enthuse and motivate in a fast-changing environment. Pay attention to the mentoring and coaching of staff to help raise their skills and increase their agility.
- Communication: Handling ever changing relationships, constantly communicating the right messages to all stakeholders.

FOCUS UPON OPPORTUNITIES

Rather than worrying about problems we could focus upon opportunities. This could be an ideal time to create a new talent access models that helps schools to optimise their internal resources. For instance, creating an opportunity for greater sharing of talent across phase or subject boundaries will allow leaders to create an opportunity to best use the talent available, as well as upskilling others. This strategy will maximise resources, over time, breaking down organizational silos allows for focussed collaboration to foster innovation. This talent mobility should even out over time and be of mutual benefit to all, not least in fostering a culture of mutually beneficial collaboration and support.

KNOW HOW THEY AND STAFF ARE FEELING

In the absence of formalised principal wellbeing policies, principals and school leaders will require support in dealing with this intensification of their work. They are working a significant number of hours each week and they need to reflect upon their own wellbeing as well as that of others as they deal with work which by its very nature is emotionally draining.

At any time it is important for schools to understand how staff are feeling and thinking. In the absence of face to face conversations and physical interaction this will be difficult as supporting others begins with being

present. How can we support and seek to assure the wellbeing of our staff? Clearly one to one training is not scalable, especially when social distancing is still in place. The answer lies in empowering teachers to measure, consider and manage their individual wellbeing. It is individual emotional awareness which plays a crucial role in determining our activity and success as well as our friendship patterns and our happiness.

A WAY FORWARD

Over recent months I have worked alongside Mick Walsh of the Learning Curve in support of teachers' wellbeing. Mick has developed a blend of video and worksheet-based tasks to support individual awareness and engagement designed to inform individual monitoring and action. Heavily focused on the individual rather than any data collection has meant that this program has offered variety and choice as it addresses a range of topics. This approach accepts that participating teachers and leaders will have differing preferences as the course unfolds. This leads to a focus based upon choice meeting a range of needs as people meet the circumstances in which they find themselves. I have included an exemplar of one of the worksheets at the end of this article. More information is available from learningcurve.com.au

Our aspirations for our school leaders is that as the look to the calmer waters ahead they find in themselves and others the optimism and open mindedness that nurtures confidence in their individual as well as the collective ability of their schools to create better futures; after all health and wellbeing are not luxuries they are human rights. ■

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WELLBEING FITNESS CHALLENGE 2

Kind to Yourself

Aristotle once wisely said that *"The most important relationship we have, is the one with ourselves."* How often do you treat other people better than you treat yourself? And how often do you say yes to others, which really means you are saying no to yourself? Describe your thoughts about these two questions:

.....
.....
.....

Have the courage to be kind to yourself, by using positive self-talk to contest negative mind chatter, and being optimistic to believe you can create new habits through your own efforts. Describe:

* Some things you could do to be more kind to yourself:

.....
.....

* Some examples of *I can and I will* positive self-talk you could use:

.....
.....

* Some new habits that you could and should create to be more kind to yourself:

.....
.....



A great self-kindness builder, is to make a *Feel Good Menu*, which you choose from when you start to notice stress and anxiety creeping up on you. Come up with five things that you love doing that you can do in most places. Eg, doing simple stretching exercises, or colouring in. Then pause, to give yourself self-awareness space, to choose from your menu to challenge your negative mind chatter:

(Acknowledgement: Kristin Neff)

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

Share your *Feel Good Menu* with colleagues on the AEU facebook page.

Mindful Gratitude practice: run off the Gratitude for Relationships sheet from the AEU website, put one on the fridge at home and in the staffroom, and one for every class in your school.

During this week, create time with your family, your students and your colleagues, to write down how grateful you all are to our health care workers who helped everyone through these uncertain times. Then collect them all and deliver them to your local hospital.

You may wish to repeat this activity for other people who were there for all of you.



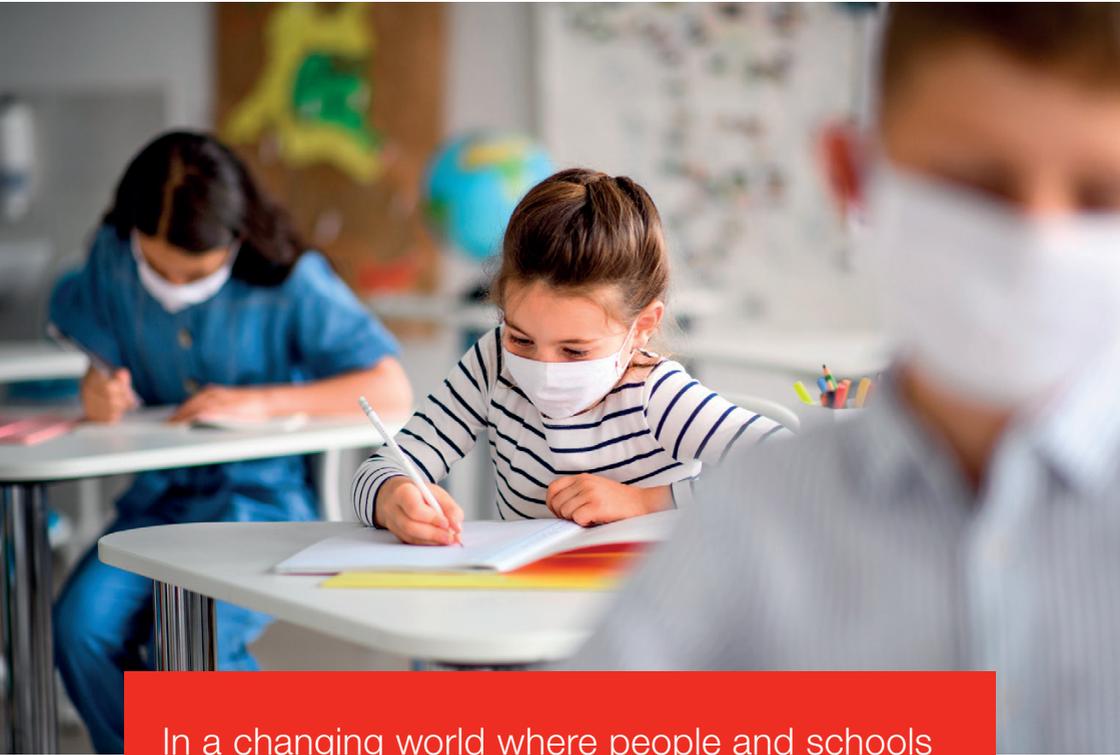
BIG FOUR CHECK IN:
This week how did you:

	feel in yourself?		exercise daily?		eat healthy?		sleep deeply?
--	-------------------	--	-----------------	--	--------------	--	---------------

"To be self-kind, be mindful of yourself, gentle with yourself and honest with yourself." MW

How design thinking can help us face new challenges





In a changing world where people and schools have to cope with ever-changing contexts, there is a call for new ideas and projects. School principals are getting more and more focused on leadership and new roles and among these Project Management.

MARIA ROSARIA D'ALFONSO
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IC EMILIO MACRO, ROME

“We interrogate the world by making.”

Planning is a minute by minute process in the Covid era when spaces have to be distanced, more open spaces are required for teaching purposes and the well-being of all of us, school leaders as well, is constantly at risk. The question is: what about the children? How can we save them from all the tension and the dangers?

In our school WELLNESS has become a main concern before and during the Covid era. We have experimented New Inclusive Time-In approaches and turned to Design Thinking for solutions.

This year there is still work in progress with the school architects who are also the members of an Emergency Committee assembled according to school autonomy (DPR 275/1999). The team is made up of volunteers and there are no expenses for their collaboration.

The two school architects were asked to come up with a new design for the Covid area, a space where children with symptoms are taken by the Covid referent (janitor or teacher), before the family comes to get them, as a precautionary step towards contagion.

Now, considering child psychology at ages 3-14, it is not hard to imagine the reaction: doubt, fear, delusion. If the school is the safest place at the moment, why does one have to be escorted to this unusual place, a kind of Twilight Zone, as a left-out?

This is where the Design Thinking came in. As David Kelley pointed out, DT is a human-centered approach and it requires creativity and centeredness on “wild ideas.”

It is also an interdisciplinary approach and for this the members of the School Committee were summoned. To begin with, the clinical experts were asked:

WHEN SHOULD THE CHILD BE ESCORTED TO THE COVID ERA?

The reply was a vademecum with three main questions:

- does the child have fever superior to 37,5 degrees C?
- does he/ she have a sore throat?
- is he/ she losing ability to smell?

This way the Covid referents would have specific guidelines and not bother with useless points.

The next step was asking the teachers

DOES THE CHILD HAVE INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON?

The answer was” yes, we have been working on it in class; the student at any age must always be aware of what is going on”.

Then came consultation with the school architects.

“IS THERE ANY WAY THAT WE CAN BREAK THE TENSION ABOUT THE COVID SPACE RIGHT FROM THE START?”

The answer was “Yes, to begin with let’s call the area simply “ The Waiting Room”.

Then came the pedagogy.

Suggestopedia was considered basic in this case. Affective filters had to be kept low and the child needed to be comfortable in a waiting room where he was expected to stay for approximately 15 minutes before being taken home.

Sound and visual aids were taken into consideration, with a sort of synesthetic effect. I hear, I see, but I can just imagine the touch of it. Colors were selected according to their impact, i.e. blue and green.

How much does the imagination count in this case? Could it alleviate the tension?

Psychology and philosophy say that we should avoid pain and seek pleasure ; good things chase away the bad things in life. A moment of forgetfulness could always help.

With this perspective, Youtube videos according to age were downloaded and examined: the student could chose his own simply through an Iphone (preferably personal or already provided for in the room). The best thing would be to avoid touching in any case.

The furniture in the Waiting room was also designed.

It focused mainly on three points:

- Effect
- Comfort
- Cost

At this point came the shopping list as follows:

- multicolored lamp € 29.99
- micro sd to download music and audio messages € 6.57
- battery charger € 10.00
- Free-time/ soft-time billboards with games and puzzles € 30.00
- little armchairs € 50.00
- indoor Plant € 15.00
- shield-screen € 74.00?
- curtain or blind + accessories (stick / pole) € 20.00 et 3.00
- nogs and screws € 8.25

The total amount for each Waiting Room in the seven school buildings which make up our school would be as follows: € 1,785.21

Now, when it comes to budgeting for the school principal, there comes in a reasonable doubt: “ Ay that’s the rub”.We are currently figuring out possibilities:

- fundraising on behalf of the parents, i.e. 2 euro per family in each school building
- sponsors or donations
- individual contributions
- spending part of the school budget allotted by the government for side/minute expenses

We would like to furnish the Waiting Room as soon as possible.

Each year, as the school principal, I have personally contributed with my own donations either in currency or through my books, which were suggested by the School Council to be made available for school fairs and whose profits were entirely to be handed over to the school.

Right now, this could be a good way and a fast way to start.

It is even advisable to save here and there on the expenditures by leaving out unnecessary details in the Waiting Room Project, for instance the curtains.

The Room is thus conceivable as a Living Room, a place to relax, a fun place, a place to get good emotions going.; it should give you the feeling that you are at home, home sweet home.

This becomes even more so if the child taken there is a a problem case in itself, a SEN child, e.g autistic, deaf, ADHD or other.

We have also consulted the Special Needs Department on this matter in order to be more specifically prepared on the modus-operandi and to get some useful views.

The idea expressed was that colors have a symbolical function, with a language of their own so that they can trigger sensations and lead to joy or happiness, calm or tension, excitement or depression. Dark colors inspire loneliness and fear, whereas a microspace of “warm colors” leads to comfort and a relaxed atmosphere, especially with SEN children. One color chosen as a positive ingredient for the Waiting Room was yellow, the symbol of the light and the sun ; other colors of preference were orange, an emotionally “warm color”, and blue for calmness.

We learn through the five senses, among which feeling and sound. Thus, the materials chosen and sound all count in an Inclusive Waiting Room. For instance some comfortable and squeezable cushions and some music in the background are some of the good ways to relax in the Waiting Room. The walls could be imagined as furnished with boards equipped with storytelling scenes and the voice of a storyteller; some soft music could do as well.

We are soon expecting to hear representatives (manager, psychologists, social workers) from Save the children, Foundation Bulgari and the Municipality VI.

The Waiting Room of course may be improved at any time.

We would also like to compare ideas with ESHA magazine readers and other schools in Italy and worldwide.

Please contact us at: rmic8e600x@istruzione.it

The children were thrilled to be back to school after the lockdown: this was pretty obvious.

The question is at this point, don't we want to keep that good feeling going? ■

November 2020 NAPD Bulletin Half term's report Voices from the chalk face



The recent educational journey has been packed with incidents and surprises at every stage: lock-down, cancelled exams, calculated grades and the ensuing controversy, re-openings and anxieties, emergencies over hand sanitisers and other essential goods for health and safety, rumblings on winetavern street – This has been a roller-coaster ride that no-one signed up for: teacher, student, parent, principal or deputy. Roald Dahl's half term's report (above) seems simple by comparison! Derek West has been talking to school leaders.

BY DEREK WEST

Just before the October break, I interviewed Margaret, Risteard, Brenda and Roisín (not their real names). I wanted to find out about the experience of re-opening school under Covid-19 conditions and how they responded to the Taoiseach's announcement on October 19, that the whole, country was going to Level 5 until December 1.

Determination, concern, exhaustion – The common threads

The four people share an attitude of determination and resilience. They are committed to keeping their schools open. They firmly believe it's the right thing to do and it's what almost all students want. They are committed to the wellbeing and safety of the students in their care.

They are also concerned about the welfare of the teachers and ancillary staff, of the anxieties below the surface – fears for their own safety, especially those with underlying conditions, concerns about their own families, the challenges for many of adapting to IT as the main means of teaching.

Another common thread is exhaustion. Risteard admits to running 'on fumes' at the end of September; now it's just 'thin air'. Staff are very fragile at the moment. 'They can see it in us, too,' says Roisín, 'but we don't say we are.'

Schools are on the edge, tense with nerves and fatigue, and yet they have 'kept the show on the road'.

They have consolidated the teaching and learning, focused on systems – the one-way corridors, the masks, the orderly rows of desks, social distancing, drilling students in the procedures, constantly stressing conformity – (both arms stretched) 'Are you that distance from one another?'

These things they have in common, but the individual experiences speak of diversity of response and of coping.



MARGARET

Margaret is possibly the most positive of the quartet. ‘Thank God the school’s open,’ she says and looks back on school during the two months to the end of October ‘as the most stress-free environment I have ever worked in.’ She is a Year Head in an inner-city school and also acts as Chaplain. She reports that they have had 80% attendance so far this term ‘Pretty brilliant,’ she reckons. Students are glad to have a sense of purpose; they are coping well because ‘teaching and learning is the priority, and the fundamental layer of safety is in place.’ So much so that, in the ‘last few months,’ she says, ‘I’ve done some of the Chaplaincy work that I haven’t been able to do for years.’ She offers ‘pop-up meditations’, or just ‘sitting in stillness’ with children who are in crisis. That’s particularly important in this DEIS school: 15% of the students (out of 400) require individual attention from the Student Support Team. There are at least 42 homeless students. ‘We are getting through them on a weekly basis,’ she says.

Before we spoke, she had written to me about life in her school:

“You would hardly believe how the school is during these bizarre times. There are virtually no behaviour issues. Teaching and learning hasn’t

been as good for years. And students are quite happy despite the absurdity of mask wearing and hand sanitizing. There is a calmness and stillness that is heartening and heart warming. All doors are open, windows too. There is no photocopying and no wasted paper. Teachers use visuals in every lesson. Students use their devices freely. Staff have to sit wherever there is an available seat in the staffroom and cliques between colleagues have all but disappeared, as new conversations happen all the time. There is a layer of trust and community cohesion that is kind of unbelievable. It is a good news story from the Covid experience.

“The Principal of the safe school we all work in now, personally installed hand sanitisers, screwing them into the walls. He got on to the roof of the school and strengthened the air filtering system to make it cleaner. He stuck ‘Stay safe’ and ‘Wash your hands’ signs all over the school. He improved the IT systems in the school. He organised food hampers and distribution of devices to vulnerable students’ homes. He has led a team of Senior Management, Counsellors, Teachers, Special Needs Assistants, General Operatives, Admin. staff, catering staff and students with grace and dignity. He hasn’t had a break since March. We are so very proud of him. “

A new kind of leadership

‘A new kind of leadership is emerging,’ she says, ‘when systems have become a matter of life and death.’ No more than herself, the principal was not particularly good at systems, but, ‘drawing on his capacity to reflect, he set about creating a safe school environment’ and, by so doing, giving reassurance and confidence to the teaching staff, and reducing the number of discipline problems they have to deal with. Why was that? I asked. Margaret replies, ‘Because of the health and safety precautions we had to put in place – the students’ names on the desks, the sanitising after every class, a traffic-light system for the toilets (and a record of every toilet break on the IT). It has resulted in

transparency and accountability in the building at a level that had not been there before.

‘It did take nearly the whole month of September for those teachers with underlying conditions to believe we were safe,’ Margaret says. But the principal did it, and in a catchment area that has an extremely high incidence of Covid-19. ‘We do feel it’s risky. However, in the school I work in, we feel safe.’ They have had not had one single case since the school opened in September.

Margaret knows teachers in other schools who don’t feel safe, who don’t have confidence in their leadership. Her principal listened to what teachers were unhappy about. He looked at the I.T. system, which was the school’s communication system, and, during the lock-down in spring, he set about improving that.

Masks: individual freedom and responsibility

I raise the topic of masks and those who deny their usefulness and who ‘bang on about’ individual freedom. The parents of five students asserted that masks weren’t necessary. ‘We just kept on doing what we had been doing,’ says Margaret, and quoting Eamon Ryan, ‘We just kept knitting’. They adopted a short, sharp, shock system – suspension for not wearing a mask. That had been clearly communicated to students and parents. ‘We have regulations that all agreed are fair.’ The five parents came round.

‘We just kept knitting’

We pursue the concept of individual freedom a bit further, coupling it with responsibility. Margaret states that she has spent her life advocating for minorities, marginalised people, but, she says, ‘I’ve found it’s not enough for these people to have rights; they have to have responsibility. Education has taught them to recognise their rights and to fight for

them, but it hasn't done enough work on the reflective processes that we need in order to be responsible. You need to work restoratively to change what you're annoyed about.'

City connects

Margaret is deeply committed to teaching and learning, as core functions of the school, but even that is surpassed by her concern for the welfare of the students. We digress from Covid – and yet we really don't – as she talks about 'City Connects', a wrap-around service for schools, based on a programme developed at Boston College. It works with a range of onsite community services – social workers, medics, psychologists providing a drop-in facility within the school campus. Margaret thinks every school should have 'City Connects'; she has no doubt that it is essential in the school she works in.



RISTEARD

Ristead's immediate response to the October 19 announcement was 'Well, we don't have to make any changes because we have designed our provision to be primarily online with practicals on site, on the basis that there was going to be a lockdown at some stage.'

He is Principal of a College of Further Education in Dublin. What concerns Ristead is that this online provision highlighted the absence of

the social interaction in the classroom and, in doing so, emphasised the enormous importance of that social interaction.

“Ristead is left walking the corridors of a ghost college.”

He regrets this. It denies the teacher the verbal and visual cues, the facial expressions that enable you to spot a student who is struggling in class. This was an important factor in his decision to include on everyone’s timetable, one day in the college for practical work, while the other four days are online.

Even this measure does not bring the place alive. ‘There is now no atmosphere in the college, where normally there is a great buzz’. The canteen has closed down, having tried a move to take-away. There was just not enough business for the local ladies who have run it for eighteen years to continue. FE is embedded in its immediate community – more than half the students come from within two miles of the college. Thus, this closure is very demoralising.

Ristead is left walking the corridors of a ghost college. Staff are only on the premises if they are working on class preparation (most of the classrooms are too small for social distancing, so they have been converted into workspaces for the teachers) or if they are conducting practical instruction. The chance of social encounters at water-cooler or photocopier is no longer possible. The atmosphere is unreal, disjointed.

Mindfulness, training, relaxed working conditions

‘People I have met, says Ristead, ‘are enormously stressed. I have huge concerns about staff wellbeing.’

This is a recurrent theme in the conversations I have had with school leaders. Behind the cheery determination to ‘keep the show on the road’, there are anxieties. Ristead is preoccupied with this. One solution has been to provide online mindfulness sessions for anxious staff.

Ristead has also been active in facing his school into a future of blended learning. He is striving to make the working conditions for the teachers as easy and relaxed as possible. Teachers can work from home, if they

wish, or they can come in, to use one of the new workrooms, to have somewhere to lay down their bag or their laptop. But he also senses the absence now of the camaraderie among colleagues in the staffroom [now seldom in use, due to social distancing rules].

An enormous amount of time was taken up over the summer on training teachers to deliver classes online, developing a totally different set of pedagogies, familiarising people with a variety of devices to make the teaching effective.

‘After all, you can’t just give a two-hour lecture – you’d be dead!’ he quips. He encourages the teachers to take a break – turn off the camera – from time to time.

He becomes quite agitated about the need for adequate technical back-up for the staff. Because of the high percentage of online teaching that’s taking place, comparable to that in higher education, where there is technical back-up, he feels it is an unreasonable demand to expect the FET teachers to be their own technicians as well and ‘if your laptop doesn’t work the gateway to your work is closed.’ The provision of such a facility for FET would be ‘hugely valuable’.

He keeps his dispersed staff up to date on Level 5 and other developments, through a weekly email, light in tone and offering advice as well as news.

The students

He has a lot to say about his students. When he answered his phone to me, he quickly dismissed the Level 5 issue. At that moment he was far more concerned about the welfare of two of his students, both deaf; one of them blind. Students with special educational needs are part of the diverse student body that makes up the college. SEN students find the online learning environment ‘really, really difficult’, but the philosophy of FET is to be inclusive and he is prepared to engage in a search for appropriate teaching methodologies and supports.

The status of FET

Ristead returns to a theme that has been running through our conversation – the status of FET in Irish education, the inadequate recognition for the sector, the fact that it falls between two stools. His major concerns relate to the structures for Further Education, the anomalies and contradictions that exist therein. He is answerable to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, (Minister Simon Harris) which has its own set of protocols for Covid precautions, as well as control of teacher contracts, terms of employment, arrangements for leave and for absences due to Covid. But FET colleges that also offer mainstream post-primary education, are also answerable to the DES (Minister Norma Foley), with its own protocols. He regards himself as fortunate that his is an exclusively FET college, although it is accommodated in a former junior boy's school, but the teachers are regarded as second-level.

Who cares for the carers?

'But, how are YOU?' I ask him. 'Like everyone else,' he replies, 'beyond shattered.' He describes his attempted getaway to a hotel in Clare in the summer – the first of a series of phone calls from the college came on the first day away. He talks about a relentless flow of documentation, with multiple re-interpretations of regulations and measures, twice and thrice a day. He talks about re-writing the colleges' Covid response document four times in a week. PPE arrived in the school on the Friday before 'we opened on the Monday'. He sums up the level of frustration as 'very wearing.' He bemoans the lack of cohesion, the fact that the interpretation of the measures is being delegated to people who 'don't understand provision, or the day-to-day college operations.' He also wants to be fair – 'It's completely new to everyone. It IS an emergency and everyone's doing their best.'

He is conscious of new expectations on him as the leader. 'One of the functions of leadership is to be positive, supportive, encouraging.' He spent the first ten days of the term reassuring staff – conscious of the nervousness, the sense in some of vulnerability. He felt he had to provide both comfort and structure. He aimed to be consultative and collaborative, to empower the teachers through the training and open to answering all questions if he could – and if he couldn't he undertook to talk to someone who might have the answer. 'You have to keep everything going'.

Endorsement for inspirational teachers

The interview ends on a positive note. Ristead is lost in admiration for what his colleagues are doing in the college. 'Fantastic work! The commitment, the dedication of the teachers – that's what keeps me going.. They are uncomfortable, disconcerted by all the changes, but they're doing their best with innovation, experimentation and creativity, to get their students to the standard they need to get to. It's inspirational!' After more than 20 years in senior management, he still loves his job. It is difficult and it is tiring, but that doesn't stop him getting up in the morning. 'Absolutely not! I love being in the company of teachers – a bunch of people who are entirely focused on others, not themselves.'



BRENDA

Brenda is indignant

Brenda is indignant about certain things and she lets me know in a direct and forthright manner.

‘I’m just really cross that we’re going to Level 5. If they’d enforced Level 3 and what people should be doing, we wouldn’t be in this situation. It’s we who are doing things right who are paying for other people who are not doing what they should be doing.’

And she’s lost patience with some people: ‘If I hear anyone else saying ‘I’m exhausted’, I’d really like to say to them ‘What about those in the front line, who have not even had week-ends off?’ And by front line, she means health workers, like her sister, her brother-in-law, her nephew – all doctors. ‘If they (the complainers) were on the front line they’d really understand what it was. It’s just so annoying,’ she says, ‘we’re all tired!’ ‘They say schools are safe,’ she adds but this is in the context of the closure at Tarbert CS, the unrest in the ASTI and, closer to home, the Year head who is, well, jittery in class, terrified of coughs and sneezes, up to 999, and on Facebook all the time. ‘It’s impacting on the students,’ says Brenda, ‘even though they’re saying, ‘We’re fine.’ This unnerves Brenda – ‘people need to relax a little bit as well.’

Desperate for schools to stay open

She is desperate for schools to stay open. The lock-down experience of remote learning was not a success in this school. 'If you talk to any teacher individually, they will say we do not want to be online. It was awful. It was extremely hard to engage students.'

There were tensions with parents who wanted live classes online from the beginning of the lock-down and teachers who said they couldn't go online during the day because they had their own children to mind. And they weren't sufficiently familiar with the technology to be comfortable with it anyway.

'Then there were the children who didn't do any work,' says Brenda. 'We rang home an awful lot. Some of them were just not engaging – they were out on street corners, gathering on the greens – that's why we need the schools open.' She feared that, if the schools were to shut again, they'd all be on the greens, the whole time, and that the parents, working from home, wouldn't have the time to ask them 'Where are you going? What are you doing?'

This is why Brenda wants the schools to stay open. That's where teaching and learning can happen. She likes the order that the Covid precautions has imposed. 'They go to their classrooms the minute they come it and are not allowed to move to other classrooms. And they are accepting this.'

It is impacting on certain aspects of learning. 'Group work, such a big part of JCT, is gone, no working in pairs, no shared projects, but the building is much quieter than it was, because they are not moving every 40 minutes.' I suspect Brenda doesn't miss these things all that much.

Back in class – using the old methods

She's a Deputy Principal but in the first few weeks of the autumn term she had to substitute for a language teacher. 'I was in the classroom, with the desks all in rows, using the old methods. I believe in the old methods because they work. And the students, they were learning, they

were responsive in class, so I didn't find any difficulty. Our students have adapted (to the new situation). I haven't heard anyone say that it's hindering learning. The older people, like myself, are absolutely delighted! She thinks students, especially those in Sixth year need to be pragmatic and to accept these tried and tested methods – if they're doing Leaving Cert. They need to learn (by heart); they need to reproduce (their knowledge). I'm not saying it's right, but after Junior Cert. they have a lot of difficulties coming into the Fifth Year (work regime). Her advice to them is simple: 'Think Leaving Cert.'

Keeping open, providing the classes, is a precarious business, hugely dependent on the kindness of colleagues to cover for those who are absent through illness or self-isolation. She talks of trying to find substitutes for nine classes in a day. 'I had to ask teachers for extra periods. Luckily, they helped out.' She talks about two young teachers sharing a house with a third person (not on the staff) who has proved positive, so they are gone for the time being. Another house is shared by four young members of staff – it's all hanging by a thread.

With the canteen gone, the social interaction for students is hugely restricted; with five separate staffrooms, 'you just don't see the whole staff together.' People she used to talk to every day, she doesn't even see.

For all that, Brenda says that the underlying mood is of positivity. Teachers want to be in school. They don't want to be at home online. 'We're not that mad about distance learning – the classroom is tops!'



ROISÍN

'Calm has been restored for a while,' Roisín says, as I catch up with her, just before 5 pm. She has spent most of the day, since just after 9 am, in the maze that is contact tracing – 'That's how long it takes,' she says. The evening rush-hour is in full swing outside her office (she is principal of an urban school for girls) and she is still at her desk. She is amazingly upbeat, but that is part of her leadership policy.

What is 'close contact'?

Kafka would be happy to take on her day for the plot of one of his dystopian novels. She has tussled with GDPD, with the HSE. She wants to know what exactly a 'close contact' is (apparently, it is someone who is with you, unmasked, for 15 minutes or more.) She'd like someone from public health to go on the airwaves and get that information clearly out there.

A student has been identified as Covid positive. Roisín wants to know if and how that information can be conveyed to the school community. She has been in dialogue, on and off, all day, with a doctor in the HSE, who has no secretarial help. There's a lot of uncertainty in a situation where time is of the essence. There's been checking and double-checking of the classroom seating. The child tested positive over the weekend and was last in school on the previous Thursday (I'm talking to Roisín

on a Wednesday). That, apparently, is significant, but in order to get a letter – no, two letters from the HSE (one for staff and one for parents) – it has taken 15 phone-calls. ‘A lot of the time I was talking to officials who weren’t medics at all and who were giving out differing information. This took an inordinate amount of time.’

‘We’re fixers!’

‘But you know,’ says Roisín, ‘we’re fixers, so we try to manage the whole thing!’

She admits that her heart sank when she heard the Taoiseach’s announcement. ‘We had no summer – much – and now I can’t go beyond 5km. But you go out there, onto the corridor, and put a smile on your face to keep people’s morale up. We’re trying to keep as much consensus and happiness amongst them. You’ve got to keep all the show on the road.’

A ‘virtual day’

They’ve just had a virtual day in school. None of the girls in; lessons online – ‘to see how our IT was working’. She’s keen to be prepared if there’s a reversion to distance or blended learning. They had planned to do this earlier, but when they came back in September, to see the building for the first time since March, with its new lay-out and restrictions, ‘our emotional intelligence told us it wasn’t the time for training!’ ‘We battened down the hatches, for the first part of term, consolidated and worked at all the Covid-related things (one-way systems, drilling the students).’

If ever there was another lock-down, they wanted to be ready, so they had their virtual day. ‘Everyone was on task; everyone was so co-operative and so helpful. They want the best for their students.’

Vulnerability and anger

Roisín is aware, however, of an atmosphere that is edgy, nervy, tense

with fatigue. 'I do feel that staff feel very vulnerable.' A tone of anger enters her voice: 'Schools are the glue of society. That's a huge thing to be doing. Teachers don't feel they are being thanked or appreciated, as they should be, at a national level, or by society in general. They feel they have been treated as a separate category, thrown under the bus, again and again. It's really important that they are heard.'

Her tone lightens when she returns to the students: 'The sympathy and empathy of teachers is with every student. The children are delighted to be in school. The Leaving Certs just don't want a repeat of last year. They don't want to be sent home; they don't want calculated grades.' But, the dichotomy is that this comes at a high cost to teachers: 'They have to be mother and father to these children, when they are in school, and they have to be that when they go home to their own. They are keeping the show on the road. We're all trying to do the right things, but (echoing Brenda, she adds) the crunch point comes if we don't have enough subs.'

Still 'up for it'

She echoes Risteard, when I ask her if she is still up for it, after 21 years in the job, with an affirmative 'Yep! I like the job.' She days out for sis planning some outings in the near future (as soon as it is possible) for students and teachers. She knows an outdoor pursuits centre that is on top of all the Covid precautions – they'll get there as soon as they can. 'The First Years don't know each other without a mask.' Clearly, they'd benefit from such an outing; so would the others.

'You need to hold out something positive for every year group. Hope is really important.'

As we part, she and I look forward to the resumption of a real NAPD Conference, in a real setting. 'Let's meet up,' she says, 'and have a nice little tippie!'

Asti safety concerns

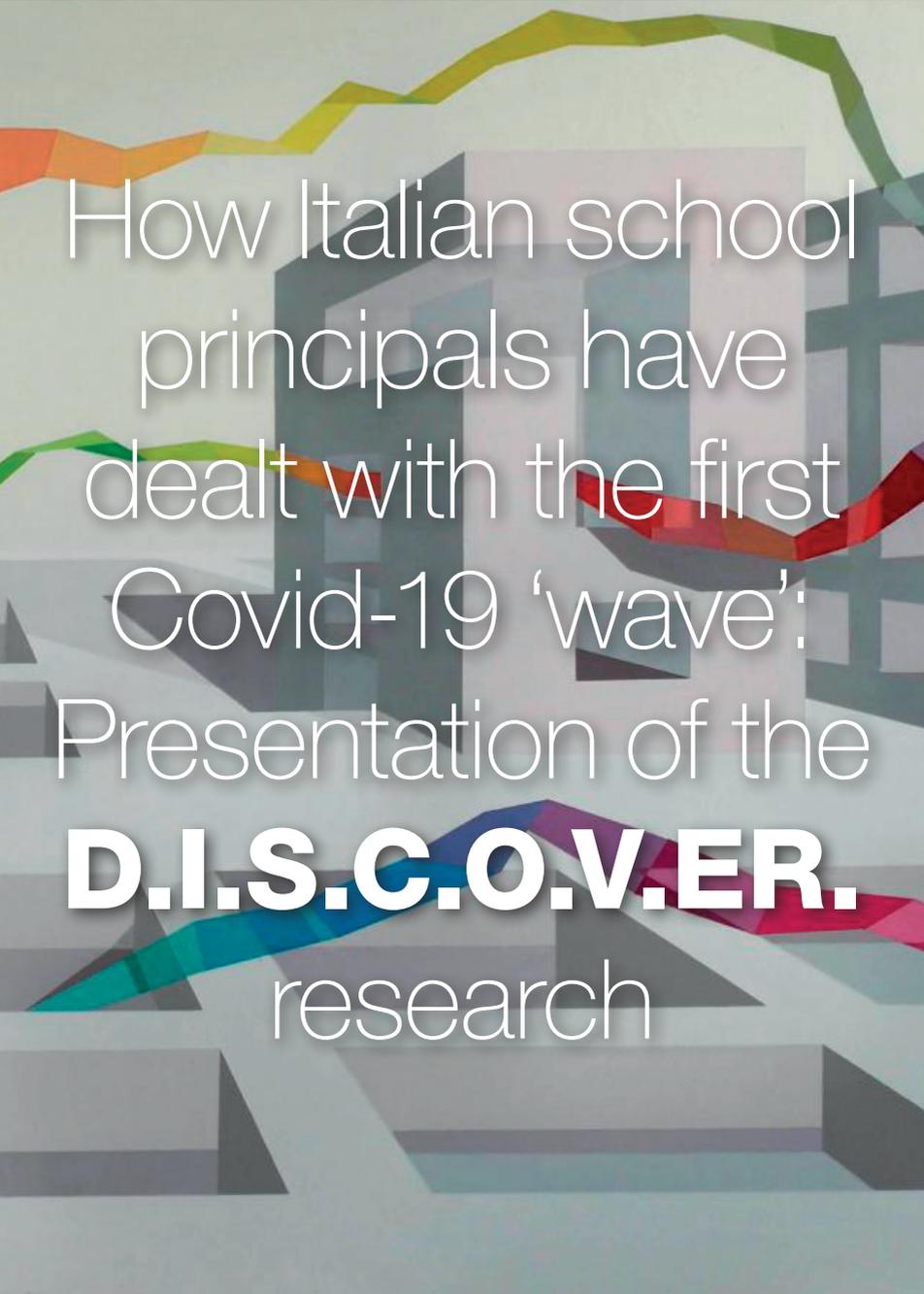
I'm finishing this article off as news breaks of a threat of industrial action by ASTI. I'll pass on whether a strike in time of pandemic would be of any benefit and waive the union's concerns about the old chestnuts of two-tiered pay and permanent jobs. But the list of Covid-related demands does obliquely reflect some of the concerns expressed by the leaders I interviewed.

- Physical distancing of two metres in every classroom.
- Free provision of N95 masks to all students and teachers. The N95 masks are regarded as offering a high degree of protection.
- Redefinition of a close contact as any person who has spent more than 15 minutes in a classroom with a positive Covid-19 case.
- Serial testing programme for schools.
- Guaranteed test turnaround times of 24 hours.
- Equal pay for post-2010 teachers.
- Guaranteed offer of a permanent contract, on full hours, for any teacher who returns to the system, either from Ireland or abroad.
- Provision for any teacher in the high-risk category to either teach from home or have guaranteed reasonable accommodations made in school.
- Free provision of laptops, procured centrally rather than by means of grants to schools, for students and teachers to ensure that learning can continue as much as possible if classes are required to self-isolate, or schools required to close due to Covid-19.

In England, now in lock-down again, scientists have mentioned secondary schools as places when the virus is spreading. There's no reason why it shouldn't be the same here. Roisin's experience suggests that we are not exactly on top of messaging, contact tracing or testing. Two jurisdictions on one island, with differing responses to the crisis, some of them far too slow, are not a recipe for a healthy outcome. The virus moves swiftly, knows no boundaries and is touching people of all ages.

The recall of sanitising products and the rush to replace them, upset the prospect of Half Term being a proper break. With temperatures dropping, open windows and ventilation will be a daunting challenge. It's no wonder teachers and school leaders feel edgy – they sense that, at any time now, they'll be under that bus again. ■

Derek West, NAPD Publications Editor

The background is an abstract composition of geometric shapes, including cubes and rectangular blocks, rendered in shades of grey and blue. A vibrant, multi-colored line (yellow, orange, red, purple, blue, green) winds across the scene, resembling a stylized wave or a data path.

How Italian school principals have dealt with the first Covid-19 'wave': Presentation of the **D.I.S.C.O.V.E.R.** research



BY FRANCESCA DELLO PREITE AND MARINA IMPERATO

MOTIVATIONS

School closures, the uncertainty of the times, and a strong desire to find possible solutions. All these factors combined have brought up new questions and challenges in Italian school principals forcing them in investigating and analysing a huge number of problems in a very urgent way, with responsibility and efficiency:

- Given those new cultural, economic and social circumstances how can we guarantee the right to education for all our pupils and prevent to widen inequalities that in our country are still plenty?
- How to reorganise and redesign classes whose essence is also made of words, eye contact, physical presence, ideas as well as feelings which tend to play a crucial role in the dynamics of interpersonal relationships?

- What's the most suitable training program for teachers and principals in order to provide them with *empowerment* as well as *agency* processes that they would definitely need to cope with this unprecedented educational context?
- What deal can be made between school and families in order to help them synergically cooperate with each other?

All the questions listed above represent the context in which the project 'Dirigere le scuole al tempo della pandemia' (English translation: '*School leadership in pandemic times*') was originally created. The group of research D.I.S.C.O.V.E.R is the founder and author of this project whose purpose is to explore, investigate and gather together principals' feedbacks and experiences as well as to focus on the following points:

- To understand those educational aspects that have been radically reshaped by heads of school during the first lockdown and the means that have been used in order to do that;
- The approach promoted in order to guarantee the flow and high standard education as well as, the respect and freedom of opinion in education, the right for parents to choose the most suitable educational approach for their own child, and the right to education for all pupils;
- To investigate the different resources that have been chosen during the shift between face to face education and distance learning;
- To acknowledge whether or not and also how we have been able to understand and satisfy the needs of pupils and their own families. Especially those ones who are economically or educationally disadvantaged and/or have learning disabilities;
- To understand if and what lesson in particular this unprecedented situation has 'taught' our principals. The skills that most have supported them in order to stay focus, proactive, and resilient;

- To detect what changes need to be made in the current educational policy in order to be prepared for future educational challenges;
- To develop an up-to-date educational training for principals in order to help them grow professionally.

RESEARCH ASPECTS

The main traits of the D.I.S.C.O.V.E.R research are flexibility and observation. Both are extremely important aspects for this type of research which purpose is to cope with unprecedented circumstances, different opinions and approaches as well as address all the matters listed above. Epistemology has been the Research-Methodology approach chosen for this project which has been successful in developing a narrative research approach that focuses on principals' professional feedbacks and experiences during lockdown.

Individual Interviews have been the preferred method of data collection for this research. Interviews have been proved to be the most productive approach in order to gain subjective perspectives as well as deeper insights of a study such as the one presented in this article.

Inputs have been given to school principals. The proposed inputs mainly have attempted to investigate two aspects such as: organisation practices and conceptual frameworks, which also have supported head teachers to manage their workload. Finally, the educational leadership aspect that is extremely crucial for schools of the third millennium. Moreover, this research believes that this aspect has a central role for everyone who is part of the education system (pupils, teachers, school principals, parents, school cleaners, janitors, support staff and local entities) as it can increase motivation, agency, empowerment, self-efficacy, as well as a sense of responsibility towards themselves and the others.



THE PARTICIPANTS AND DIFFERENT STEPS OF THE RESEARCH

Interviews have taken place during the month of August 2020 until September 2020. They have been conducted on a voluntary basis and over forty school principals have taken part in this study. Participants come from schools of different grade levels (from primary school principals to secondary school principals), different Italian regions, and also have different levels of educational experience. The variety of the participants in this study made it possible to compare school leadership during the SARS2 pandemic with school management before lockdown.

- The first step can be referred to as 'enter the texts'. In fact, the feedbacks and interviews that have been collected need to be analysed with an open-minded approach. It is important at this stage, to avoid pre conceptual patterns and ideas to interfere with the study.
- The second step identifies with the process of sense-making. In other words, during this second phase the research is looking to elaborate a collective meaning, identify common patterns and draw connections among the data collected.
- During the third step, researchers have underlined those main arguments and traits of the study which are also the main components of the last two (currently ongoing) steps which are: *confirming* and *presenting the account*. The first one focuses on validating the data collected. While *presenting the account* focuses on the final outcome of the entire research.

Once all the steps are completed, in order to have a more objective perspective, a meeting between the research team and school principals will be taking place. The latter in fact, would be given access to the data collected as well as the chance to express their own personal opinion in regards to the final interpretations and conclusions of the entire research and so have a final debate. Feedbacks collected during

this meeting would be taken into account by the research team and are going to play an important role in the final report.

EXPECTED RESULTS

As it often happens with a qualitative research approach, the outcomes are not going to be taken as facts but rather they should provide us with a better understanding and insight of this particular phenomenon. Also the following points should be taken into account:

- the aspects of the professional context analysed in the research
- the relational system
- the past work context
- individual background
- the available resources.

Therefore, the purpose is to assign a broader meaning to all the decisions and actions our school principals have made during the SARS2 pandemic in order to address the complexity of the situation. Moreover, the research is hoping to identify some patterns in the data collected and present some meaningful examples of good *leadership* and *governance* which have encouraged the teaching staff in their *mission* to ensure a creative, innovative and sustainable educational program. Those *best practices* would also be shared and will become useful to cope with the current public health emergency which have led to school closure in several Italian regions, and the return to distance learning even for our youngest pupils. ■

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A study
on the maturity
and barriers of
digital literacy
in Dutch primary
education
in Limburg



INTRODUCTION

Children of the current generation are growing up in a world where media and technology are indispensable. The social consequences of this are promising for this generation, but can also be far-reaching and with a major impact on the lives of the children now and in the future [1].

READY FOR WORK?

Richard Riley, Secretary of Education under Clinton, stated that we are preparing students for jobs that do not exist yet, where they use technologies that have not been invented in order to solve problems that we do not yet know that they exist [2]. Trilling & Fadel [2] asked if

students graduating from school are ready to work. To this question, 400 executives collectively answered: “not really”. Education falls short in preparing students for 21st-century jobs because these require a different set of skills than is currently taught in our education systems. Jobs requiring routine manual tasks and thinking skills are giving way to jobs involving higher levels of knowledge and applied skills, such as expert thinking and complex communication.

IMPLEMENTING DIGITAL LITERACY

This is not only a problem in the United States. In a letter from 2019, addressing the 21st-century skills gap, the Dutch Minister of Primary and Secondary Education and Media wrote that the core objectives of primary and secondary education had not been updated for almost fifteen years. In the past, the curriculum was updated periodically by making adjustments for every learning area or sector. However, the core objectives of primary and secondary education were never examined together. Sometimes goals were added to parts of the curriculum without keeping the whole plan in mind [3]. This has led to the current state of the curriculum for basic education: fragmented, partly outdated, with gaps, duplications and accumulation of tasks for educators [3]. Teachers and students alike indicate/complain that the curriculum is too packed and that it increases their workload. To bridge the 21st century skill gap the Minister advocated for 21st century skills to take a prominent place in the curriculum of both primary and secondary education. The minister claims that the digital literacy skills, one of the 21st century skills, should get a prominent place as of 2023 in the curriculum [3].

MATURITY OF DIGITAL LITERACY

This research focused on digital literacy skills within Dutch primary education, where digital literacy is defined as: “the ability to wisely use information and communication and critically assess the consequences. Digitally literate people must be able to understand and use information



purposefully” [4]. The digital literacy skills are information literacy, computational thinking, ICT-basic skills and media literacy.

In particular, this research aimed to answer the following research questions: “How mature is the digital literacy education in Limburg’s primary schools?” and “What are the barriers or roadblocks hindering schools and educators in teaching digital literacy in Limburg’s primary schools?”.

CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT

The research, conducted by Camille Extra, Jim Bemelen, and Lars Rieser, is initiated from the research group Data Intelligence of Zuyd

University of Applied Sciences in cooperation with Maastricht University. Zuyd together with their partners wants to meet the challenges facing Limburg, the southernmost province of the Netherlands. For this reason, this research on digital literacy aims explicitly to identify the barriers in the education of digital literacy and to check the maturity of digital literacy education in Limburg's primary schools.

In a first step, a systematic review of the literature was conducted to establish the criteria that could be used to evaluate the maturity of digital literacy education in Limburg as well as potential barriers in digital literacy education. This information was used to establish an interview protocol to gather information to answer the research questions. The gathered insights from the interviews are coded with the support of the Grounded Theory Method (GTM). Data for this research was gathered by interviewing twelve professionals (teachers), who all indicated having industry-specific knowledge and experience. The professionals were selected through a random sample of primary schools in Limburg. Next to semi-structured questions, the interviews also contained a card sorting exercise in which the interviewees were asked to rank the barriers identified in the literature review from most hindering to least hindering, and the barriers were ranked from most prominent to least prominent at their own school.

MAIN BARRIERS

The first main finding is the identification and validation of the seven barriers:

- Teachers' limited digital literacy skills;
- Technological barrier;
- Integration of digital literacy in the curriculum;
- Lack of support from the school;
- Social economic status barrier;
- Scepticism towards the value of digital literacy;
- Students lack of motivation and prerequisite skills.

From the card-sorting exercise, it emerged that teachers in the sample ranked limited digital literacy skills and technological barriers as most hindering. However, a different picture emerged from the interviews in which respondents were generally positive about these two factors at their own schools. This is in contradiction with the insights from the interviews. Looking at the technological barrier, it should be mentioned that four teachers from the same school ranked this one as the most hindering. Even taking this into account, we still see this contradiction throughout the interviews. Upon revisiting the interview data to look into this contradiction it was revealed that teachers indicate that at this point, they do not see this as a barrier but foresee problems in the future. For example, some teachers indicated that at the moment schools do not possess enough devices to teach digital literacy but have the students rotate the devices. Teachers also indicate that their own digital literacy skills are sufficient (note teachers ranked themselves), but they rank the teachers' limited digital literacy skills barrier as one of the most hindering. Teachers consider their own skills as sufficient but see the skills of their colleagues as a problem. Also, because of the voluntary participation in this study teachers are quite enthusiastic about this subject. It also stands out that students lack of motivation and prerequisite skills is not seen as an issue for teaching digital literacy.

MORE THAN INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

The second finding concerns the maturity of digital literacy in Limburg's primary education. The results show that schools do pay attention to digital literacy but are in an early stage of it. Schools mainly use instructional programs in teaching digital literacy. However, these instructional programs usually do not focus primarily on digital literacy skills but are intertwined with it. Schools do sometimes have themes regarding digital literacy like media, but these are only focused on once per year. Without these instructional programs or themes, schools have little in terms of officially sanctioned curricula.

TEACHERS WANT TO INVEST

The overall managerial implication is that schools and teachers need to pay actual attention to the development of digital literacy teaching. The willingness is there, but it needs to be facilitated in a structural way based on a clear strategy. This includes developing centralized curricula and investing to address the two most hindering barriers. There should be invested in the devices and in the development of the skills of the teachers. Teachers and schools have a better sight of how to prepare themselves in educating digital literacy skills and can also improve their own skills accordingly when teachers realize that their skills might not be adequate.

WHAT'S NEXT?

To conclude this study, an answer will be provided to the two research questions. The first research question: What are the barriers or road-blocks hindering schools and educators in teaching digital literacy in Limburg's primary schools? The most common and most hindering barriers indicated by the teachers in Limburg's primary schools are technological barriers, teachers' limited digital literacy skills. The least hindering barrier is students lack of motivation and prerequisite skills. The more hindering barriers relate to the schools and teachers themselves. The power to overcome these barriers is within their own sphere of influence.

The second research question: How mature is digital literacy education in Limburg's primary schools? Teachers have indicated that they are in the early stages of implementing digital literacy. The schools in Limburg do have some officially sanctioned curricula outlining on how to teach digital literacy, but this is mainly because of the instructional programs.

EXPANDING RESEARCH ABROAD

Altogether, this study helped all stakeholders within primary schools, and the academic world to gain a better understanding of digital literacy,

the maturity of digital literacy within primary schools in Limburg and the barriers that hinder primary schools in teaching these skills. Investigating the perspective of school management and doing this research in other countries would be an interesting topic for future work. ■

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After dealing with the attractiveness of teacher and school leader positions, Digital Age impact will be researched by EEPN in the coming year

The European Education Policy Network on Teachers and School Leaders is a Europe-wide network of relevant organisations (policymakers, practitioners, researchers and stakeholders) to promote co-operation, policy development and implementation at different governance levels, and to support the European Commission's policy work on teachers and school leaders. This network is building on existing activities developed at European level, especially initiatives and projects supported through European Union programmes in the field of education. The coordinator of the 4-year project that started in January 2019 is the European School Heads Association and the network currently includes 29 partners from 18 countries.



CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

In the first year, the network chose to focus on how to make teacher and school leader careers more attractive in different European countries in its first year, 2019. In its second year that started in August 2020, EEPN will work around the very topical theme of challenges and solutions for teachers and school leaders in the digital age.

The European Commission (EC) has requested the network to work on new roles and competences of teachers and school leaders in the digital age. Some preliminary questions were raised by the EC to guide the work, namely:

- Which barriers and opportunities are brought into school education by the digital age and which opportunities does this create for teachers and school leaders to transform their competences and practice?
- What support do teachers and school leaders need in order to make the most of digital age opportunities and to foster a culture of innovation, sharing and continuous improvement in schools?
- How to make effective use of digital technologies for teaching and student learning; collaboration; and network-building?
- How is and should Initial Teacher Education adapt to the changing role of teachers and school leaders brought about by digital transformation?

The consortium has decided to work along the lines of five thematic strands to explore the evidence base for the above questions as well as support the formulation of policy recommendations for European, national, regional and local levels. As a first step, we will create desk research papers on the following topics:

- Digital technical *tools*, skills and competences supporting teaching and learning.

- Collaborative learning and collaborative school leadership in digitalization.
- The use of digital tools in teaching and learning entrepreneurial skills and competences.
- Digitalisation supporting literacy and multilingual competences.
- Active citizenship skills and active digital citizenship skills in a digital age.



All strands will focus on relevant education research, inspiring policy initiatives and inspiring practices, including EU-funded projects, bringing in the perspectives of all network members: academia, stakeholder representatives (teachers, school leaders, teachers and parents), policy makers and social partners.

National policy makers are to be engaged from the very beginning by the respective national partners to solicit policy and practice examples from them in order to achieve an early commitment to EEPN, building a strong base for later dissemination of results.

THE OVERALL AIMS AND METHODS OF EEPN

The network aspires to help its members to combine their forces and to work together in order to inform and facilitate the development and implementation of appropriate policies on teachers and school leaders at different governance levels in Europe – and to do this more richly and fully than any single one or all individual network members separately could achieve.

The centrality of synergy in EEPN is clearly evident in its objectives. The first set of specific objectives of the network calls for:

- creating and continuously developing a broad, sustainable and inclusive network;
- facilitating dialogue and co-operation among experts from policy, research and practice; and
- promoting and supporting continuous collaboration among partners in the network and with other relevant stakeholders at international, European, national, regional and local levels, including other networks and projects funded through EU programmes.

Through this intensive and continuous collaboration and exchange, the network aims to promote and support evidence-informed policy-making. In addition, the second set of specific objectives of EEPN stipulates that the network will not simply analyse, but importantly also co-create knowledge on the opportunities, challenges and policy approaches in different education systems.

What is more, drawing on the multitude of perspectives, voices, expertise and experiences of the network partners, according to the third set of specific objectives, EEPN aims to identify, share and promote good policy practice and stimulate innovation and strategic development in policy, implementation and provision at different governance levels, with a focus on the involvement of national, regional and local stakeholders.

Last but not least, synergy should also enhance EEPN's efforts to disseminate its results and recommendations within and beyond the network, informing EU-level debate, targeting policy-makers at different governance levels, practitioners, researchers and stakeholders across Europe, as well as contributing to the European Commission's relevant dissemination mechanisms and tools.

PREVIOUS OUTCOMES ON TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER CAREERS

EEPN chose to focus on how to make teacher and school leader careers more attractive in different European countries in its first year, 2019. An important body of work by the network was the delivery of four desk research papers on the topic from different perspectives.

Two desk research papers offer analyses of good, inspiring practices from different school systems, one from a practitioner and parent perspective, another on policy implementation and experimentation. Another desk research has been done on current education research on the topic while the fourth one identified and analysed relevant European Commission funded projects. The four papers together analyse examples from various European countries and from different phases of teaching careers considering how effectively these practices, projects, policies address the most important issues school systems are facing in connection to teachers and school leaders.

The aim of the research was to offer a basis for policy development and implementation at different governance levels as well as for informing the work of the European Commission (EC) on teacher and school leader careers for inclusive quality education in all European Union Member. The research formed the basis for formulating and promoting policy recommendations in the field of teacher and school leader careers by EEPN later in 2019 and will also support the future work of EEPN until 2022/2023.

During the research phase, sometimes the same or very similar examples have been chosen, offering a solid base for tentative recommendations. While teachers have been identified as key actors in achieving the EU targets and goals, experience and statistics show that there are several aspects of teacher career paths that need to be addressed to overcome the main challenges in relation to attracting and attaining teachers to be able to make them a reality.

Desk research was looking into solutions successfully addressing the following main challenges: teacher and school leader shortage, leaving the profession early, demotivation, burn-out, low social status, inadequate salaries, professional development needs and supporting daily work, maintaining and increasing quality and inclusion in education. All these appeared essential for teachers' and school leaders' inspiring professional career paths regardless the perspective of the research. Key findings for policy makers on increasing the attractiveness of teaching professions:

- **The qualification and the responsibilities** of teachers and school leaders should be reflected in their salaries.
- **Higher level of formal education** and research-based studies tend to increase the prestige of the profession and contribute to better quality of training.
- **Accountability and autonomy are interconnected.** Autonomy afforded to teachers and school leaders contributes to the professionalisation of the jobs thus increasing their social status, accountability and the quality of their work, however relevant support is needed.
- **Initial teacher education** must include practice in order for novice teachers to be better prepared for the transition from training to job and decrease early leaving from profession.

- **Professional support** to novice teachers is crucial for preventing early leaving from the profession.
- **Continues professional development** is important at all stages of teacher careers, thus it is important to introduce such schemes for various professional career stages, including CPD for teachers before retirement.
- **School leaders need to be trained** in topics relevant to their function, including management, pedagogical leadership, appraisal of teachers and inclusion of parents, students and local communities in school activities and governance.
- **Continuous professional development** offered should be based on teachers' and other school staff needs and such, to provide proper learning.
- **Empower** school leaders and teachers to analyse their needs.
- **Offer programmes** to schools that are longer, module-based and take a whole-school approach.
- **Support peer-to-peer learning** and mentoring between teachers, between school leaders, between schools.
- **Shared leadership/distributed leadership** enhances cooperation and positive school climate.
- **Alternative paths** to school leadership position and creating a career progression path for the position of school leaders would help offer motivation for the positions.
- **Career path systems** for teachers should have a progression path, be aligned with appraisal system and reflected in teacher salaries.
- Appraisal systems should be based on development principles, evaluate quality of teaching, be fair and transparent. ■

More information about the network activities you can find here:

<https://www.fpce.up.pt/ciie/?q=en/content/eeepn-european-education-policy-network-teachers-and-school-leaders>

MultInclude
 Research for
 supporting
 schools
 in improving
 their inclusion
 strategies





BY ESZTER SALAMON PHD (EUROPEAN SCHOOL HEADS ASSOCIATION)
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Inclusion in education has been a hot topic all over Europe. There have been various attempts to develop inclusion strategies for different groups, such as for the inclusion of disabled students, newly arrived migrants, those with special needs and others. MultInclude, an Erasmus+ project ESHA is a partner of, has focused on the multiple inclusion needs of students having in mind the completion of secondary

education and continuation of studies at tertiary level. In short, what we are aiming at is educating lifelong learners by catering for the individual inclusion needs of each student. The project has two research aspect that will be presented: first there were over 70 inclusion case studies collected from all over the world and analysed for finding the “best” in best practices, secondly, based in this a self-assessment tool was developed and piloted in over 50 schools in various European countries and the experiences of these pilots have also been analysed. This is presented at the “INCLUSIVE EDUCATION LESSONS FOR CHILD’S SUCCESS” conference organised by Vytautas Magnus University, Vilnius, Lithuania on 21 December. You can register for the event by 15 December here (<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdWJ0OeULsJoVEg-3doL6pXFzW6r1VWB7VD3Nzrly51j3ifbLA/viewform>) and listen to all presentation on Zoom

Praise for MultInclude and the Scoring Matrix:

“I love it when complex concepts are translated into hands-on processes. And so, I’m a big fan of the MultInclude project’s tool for self-assessing [#inclusion](#) within schools.”

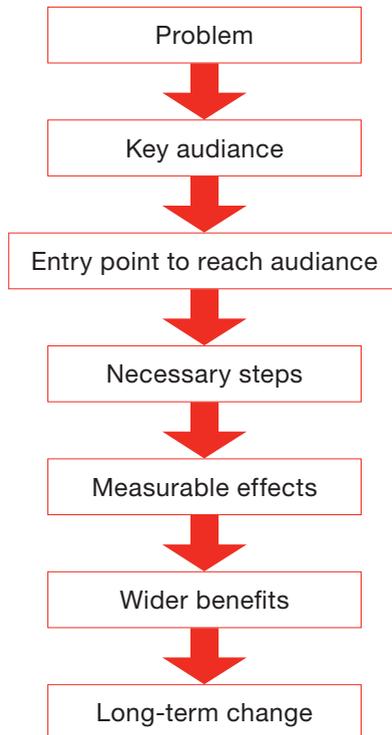
– Mari Varsányi, teacher, trainer and consultant specialising on Intercultural and Inclusive Education, the Netherlands

THE CONSORTIUM

The work was carried out in the framework of a project funded through the Erasmus+ KA3 scheme by consortium of 7 partners from 6 countries. While the European School Heads Association provided the work’s direct link to daily school practice, other partners brought in their inclusion experience with higher education (ECHO, The University of Applied Sciences in the Hague and Malmö University), two other partners provided input on digital inclusion and non-formal education (Knowledge Innovation Centre Malta and DSchola Italy).

THEORY OF CHANGE¹

All cases that are part of the #Multinclude database are considered good practices of inclusive education; yet some show interesting potential for implementation in different contexts. Out of all 70 cases, there are seven important cases that are exceptional and are therefore analysed in depth. The level of effectivity of these seven cases was analysed through the methodological framework of the “Theory of Change” (ToC). This methodological tool is used by many different organizations ranging from governmental bodies to (large) corporates and NGO’s to support the processes of policy and project development. However, ToC was initially developed as an evaluation tool. In this process, the ToC models outcomes – and with that, impact – in an ‘outcome pathway’ (Taplin et al. 2013). The ToC framework works as follows:



An important step in evaluating projects from the framework of the ToC is identifying what (pre-)conditions must be put in place to reach these goals. The success of this model is to be able to demonstrate progress by evaluating the outcomes as evidence to what extent the goals are achieved. Through six different questions, key assumptions will be defined that together answer the question: “What is the long-term change you see as your goal?” In this way, the ToC methodology provides a structured description and elaboration on the questions what, how and why. In doing so it shows how a specific project contributed to a desired change and how that development can be expected in a particular context. This chapter starts with a brief description of these cases and provides problem-based models of expectations for each individual case, in order to analyse what the actual impact is of these seven cases.

RESEARCH METHOLDLOGY²

“This project has been designed around six key verbs, each associated with a set of activities: *Detect, Analyse, Exchange, Impact, Multiply and Inspire* to operationalize lessons learned and share the insights gained from of these different proven good practices of inclusive education with teachers, schools and universities that work with communities on inclusion issues. In this chapter we will elaborate on the process of these activities.

Template development

First, it was important to develop a template for case providers to search within the networks of all partners that are part of the consortium. The process of developing the template for interviewing the case-study providers was inspired by previous knowledge and experience within the IDEAS project. The work from that project was modified by THUAS and ECHO into the working template for #Multinlude, with the aim to improve the quality and ‘effective’ information for the user of the #Multinlude

database. The aim of this template was to be able to get a broader and more thorough understanding of the context of specific cases, to be able to measure and understand the impact of the respective project or intervention. In this process, the #Multinclude template employed a case study approach described as the self-ethnography methodology, when academics study the “lived realities of” their own organizations. The idea was that case-study providers would not be asked to fill in the template, but were enabled to provide a reliable description of the national/regional/local context, the systematic and policy driven context, financial opportunities and restrictions and of course what the specific cases entail in terms of aims, process, results and impact. This ‘self-ethnography’ approach was chosen since the consortium did not have the means to research the impact of these individual cases themselves. The consortium let the case study providers describe their own projects and interventions. The outcome was a template that structured the interview based on three types of changes: strategic administrative actions, curricular change, and pedagogical change. All submitted and published cases are described based on this elaborate template that is developed by THUAS and ECHO with input from other partners.

Detecting the cases

The first part (Detect) of the project focused on identifying cases from the networks that all partners of the consortium represent. The partners from the consortium discussed within their organization what range of cases they wanted to identify. In that process, all partners looked at different aspects of diversity: target groups, type of education, type of underrepresentation, geographical spreading, urban/rural, used theoretical and methodological frameworks, type of outcomes, type of financial and other resources, policy/practice, evidence-based, easy to implement or not, level of innovation and impact (on institutional and/or student level). The next step was to discuss with other partners from within the consortium what other cases they provided, to make sure that

the entire #Multininclude database would entail many different types of projects and initiatives. This way the consortium protected the flexibility to look for cases that were missing.

Interviews

After all partners of the consortium decided what projects they wanted to reach out to, the providers from within their network were contacted to plan an interview. In some instances, the interview was scheduled to take place face to face – with other more international cases the interview took place online. This way it was possible to collect as much information as possible, also it made it possible to immediately ask in-depth questions about the provided information. This process has been very time and labour intensive, planning the interview, doing the interviewing, transcribing the interviews and in some cases translating the interviews that were not held in English. The outcome is a database that consists of over 70 rich and informative cases, much of this information often gets lost or is not provided when case providers are asked to fill a questionnaire.



Peer-review & language check

In total, over 70 cases were collected and all cases were peer-reviewed by (in some cases even multiple) partners of the consortium to make sure that the information and data that was provided, was sufficient and understandable in order to compare and eventually come to conclusions. ESHA developed a peer review questionnaire (see attachment 2). Based on the process of peer reviewing, some partners were asked to go back to the case study providers to enrich the data of the cases and to ensure that all relevant and important information was collected. The result of the peer-reviewing process is that there are over 70 cases currently approved and published on the website. These cases were taken into account for the analysis. After this step of peer-reviewing all cases underwent a language check.

Analysing the cases from the #Multininclude database

In the process of analyzing the cases, the first step for ECHO was to write a framework for analysis that would support in the process of contextualizing the different cases. This was particularly important given the fact that the cases are all so very different, situated within different contexts. In the next chapters all these different indicators will be presented. The aim of detecting the indicators was to see if there were any patterns that are compatible with existing analysis and frameworks of experience. With the data from the cases and the indicators that were generated, a number of featured cases are highlighted in chapter 4 to provide an analysis based on the model of the Theory of Change from seven successful initiatives. These seven highlighted cases are selected by the partners because they are exceptional in their own way. The model of Theory of Change provided a framework to visualize the impact of the respective projects, thereby making it possible to learn most from the designs and contexts of those initiatives. These seven exceptional cases are highlighted, described and analyzed in the next chapter.”

MAIN FINDINGS

72 inspiring and successful, grassroots initiative practices were gathered and formed the basis of an elaborate scientific analysis. The goal of the analysis was to highlight the good of good practices in the field of creating a sense of belonging at school, and by that also in community and society, and to identify dimensions of better inclusion. The focus on evidence-based ideas for inclusion means that the cases in #MultInclude are tested educational practices that can be implemented, adapted and upscaled in new contexts.

The analysis builds on multiple contextual dimensions related to inclusion in education in the EU. First it is put in the context of existing EU policies in the field of inclusive education, also in the broader global context of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Both global and European policies demand education systems to provide inclusive, quality education for all. Within this context another dimension is early school leaving prevention, meaning not only that students remain in school until a certain age, but also that they obtain skills and qualifications as well as a lifelong learning mindset for future success. In providing the dimensions for analysis two more considerations are to define our understanding of what we mean by evidence-based practices and what do we consider success and effective practices in inclusion – with regards to individual student success, sustainability, adaptability and other factors.

In the report, the methodology chosen is described in detail for the reader to understand the analysis better. It describes how the consortium spent months discussing and developing the questionnaire to do a first description of inclusion practices collected by the partners, mostly from Europe, but also from other parts of the world (12 of the cases collected and analysed with the support of ESHA members). These cases can already be used for inspiration by the reader following this link.

ECHO, the Dutch Centre for Diversity Policy chose a total of 7 cases for more in-depth analysis to find commonalities, synergies and peculiarities that can then support developing better inclusion practices on local level.

The in-depth analysis identifies a problem or challenge the practice addresses, describes the key audience of the case, introduces the entry point to address the audience, describes the necessary steps to implement the practice, elaborates on the measurable effects of the case, the wider benefits of it and the long-term change it initiates. The challenges addressed in the in-depth analyses are the following:

- Drop-out risk of children with behavioural problems (No Bad Kid – Hungary)
- Racism and radicalisation trends – (CafeLatte – Italy)
- Struggles of newly arrived migrant students to continue in education that is in a different cultural context and language – (UniClub – Austria)
- Non-native students not learning and experiencing their own language and culture in regular school context – (State Europe School Berlin – Germany)
- High drop-out rates among university students and an existing divide between students and faculty (The Big Read – Sweden)
- Challenges for higher education teachers in working with international and intercultural classes – (Realising the inclusive, international, intercultural classroom – the Netherlands)
- Need to enhance academic writing skills of students who have difficulties with writing in standard English – (Social Blogging – Jamaica)

The report then gives a cross-cutting analysis of these practices focusing on three types of changes to enhance inclusion in schools, namely,



strategic administrative actions, curricular change and pedagogical change. It also emphasises that successful cases, while having clear, measurable outcomes along their original aims, usually also has an unintended impact element on better inclusion.

Probably the largest challenge in analysing the cases identified by the partnership was that they take place in a wide variety of physical and learning environments and are implemented by very different actors. For this reason, ECHO decided to use the framework of Prof. Frank Tuit's work and focus on conditions that have proven to be beneficial to enhance inclusive education regardless the differences in the place of learning.

All 70+ cases are first assessed according to learning environments, including aspects as social environment, conditions for learning, physical and pedagogical environments. The report also highlights some important beneficial considerations for learning and inclusion that are defined and linked to the different cases. These considerations are:

- bridging gaps,
- learning and social skills,
- language and learning and
- learning through a holistic approach.

The analysis of so many and so different cases also led to a typology that the research team summarises in the report. A few characteristics of the case studies in the #MultInclude database:

- 60 of the 72 of the case studies are *grassroots initiatives*;
- 64 of the 72 case studies take place in Europe;
- 26 of the 72 case studies are based in *superdiverse, majority-minority cities* (Crul 2013);
- 64 of the 72 case studies mentioned that they monitor the progress of their programme;
- 49 of the 72 case studies are based on existing theoretical frameworks;
- 47 of the 72 case studies are initiated because of policy measures or driven by lack of policy;
- 64 of the 72 cases receive some form of financial support. A third of the programmes receive funding from a government (national, provincial or local), a third from education institutions and a third from private foundations or sponsors.

The analysis highlights the great diversity of target groups, the growing commitment to inclusive education underlined by the fact that there has been a growing number of initiatives in recent years. Cases can also be divided into groups by their primary target being prevention, intervention and/or compensation.

The fact that nearly 1/3 of cases were initiated or solely carried out by non-formal education providers with the ultimate goal of better school inclusion highlights the importance for schools to implement an open

school approach, to collaborate with their own internal stakeholders as well as external stakeholders around the school to achieve the goal of inclusive, quality education. We hope practitioners, especially school leaders will be inspired by the work done in MultInclude. You can read the full analysis report following [this link](#) after the middle of December.

PUTTING THE ANALYSIS INTO PRACTICE

On the basis of the analysis, a scoring matrix was developed and piloted in over 60 schools across Europe supporting schools to evaluate their inclusion strategies and practices along the lines of various dimensions so that they can use the collection and analysis of practices for inspiration to improve their inclusiveness.

The questionnaire of 163 items was developed along the lines of the following 7 dimensions and 4 domains:

Dimensions:

1. Admission and Access
2. Social Interaction
3. Student and Participant Support
4. Management
5. Teaching
6. Extracurricular activities and Community Outreach
7. Assessment and Recognition

Domains:

1. Intellectual and Social Development
2. Educational Resources
3. Cultural Differences
4. Classroom Environment

By using this matrix, your school or a group of teachers from the school can explore the areas the school is currently scoring low, decide how important the given area is for your school. It is a snapshot that can then be used as a starting point for developing or improving internal strategies and processes as well as to decide on action for improvement. For example, if a school identifies a need to update their management or teaching practices in the domain of catering for cultural differences, they can develop a plan for that.

(MultiInclude also offers an online course that you can register for here: <https://multinclude.eu/activities/multiply/mooc-registration/> While the Scoring Matrix focuses on the school, this gives you an opportunity to develop your professional skills and competences.)

The matrix was developed by the team doing the search and analysis, validated by experts in workshops, and evaluated for fine-tuning by piloting schools. The last element of evaluation of the matrix for finalisation was concluded partly based on the feedback of these schools, and partly through an in-depth analysis of schools' self-evaluation in the online matrix.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our analysis and piloting experiences with the scoring matrix we can convey a handful of recommendations:

- The MultiInclude scoring matrix has proven to be useful tool for even the most inclusive schools to evaluate and subsequently improve their institutional inclusion strategies. There are always new challenges and also room for further improvement. As the tool has been designed to cover a very wide range of inclusion aspects, it leads to more systemic thinking in areas that have been covered by inclusion practice, but not yet by strategy.

- Inclusion obstacles can very often be overcome by thinking outside the box, but also thinking outside the school. The majority of the 72 case studies give inspiration for opening up the school for better inclusion, and their analysis points out elements of success, however, they are not necessarily for being duplicated, but rather translated, included in the local context.
- The analysis, the scoring matrix and the online course provided can serve as a solid basis for rethinking inclusion strategies that have been focussed on certain groups (eg. disabled or migrant students) and can help school focus on the personal and diverse needs of students for a sense of belonging and quality, inclusive education. ■

Notes

- 1 This part of the article was adapted from the MultInclude Analysis Report by ECHO colleagues
- 2 This part of the article is a quotation of the MultInclude Analysis Report by ECHO colleagues

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Child Up

Child-Up (Children Hybrid Integration: Learning Dialogue as a way of Upgrading Policies of Participation) is a European project of applied research, funded under the European Horizon 2020 programme (GA 822400). It lasts three years, started in January 2019 and it will be concluded in 2022.



The Child-Up project is coordinated by Prof. Claudio Baraldi of the Department of Studies on Language and Culture at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia and involves 9 other European partners: Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego (Poland), Zentrum für Forschung, Weiterbildung und Beratung an der EHS Dresden gGmbH (Germany), Université de Liège (Belgium), Malmö Universitet (Sweden), the University of Northampton (UK) and Seinäjoki Ammattikorkeakoulu (Finland), the European School Heads Association (ESHA), the Fondation des Régions Européennes pour la Recherche l'Éducation et la Formation (FREREF) and the International Institute of Humanitarian Law (IIHL).

CHILD-UP researches into the level of integration of migrant children in Europe and their social condition, with the primary aim of providing support for migrant children's exercise of agency in changing their own conditions of integration and constructing hybrid identities.



OBJECTIVES OF CHILD-UP

Child-Up aims to investigate the school integration of migrant and refugee children and foresees an articulated research, both qualitative and quantitative, in seven European countries (Italy, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Poland, United Kingdom and Sweden) with two main objectives: (1) to better understand the phenomenon of integration among children with migrant origins and their possibilities of active participation in changing their social and cultural conditions; (2) to propose methodologies and tools to support and improve hybrid integration practices in the educational system, dialogue and promotion of active participation of children of migrant origins in Europe.

In pursuing these objectives, Child-Up focuses on children's social participation. Taking the gender dimension into account, the research focuses on the agency of boys and girls as a means to promote a negotiated construction of cultural identity in interaction and changes in their socio-cultural context.

In particular, the project pays attention to the dialogical practices in activities carried out within schools. In addition, in order to collect and analyze these practices, the perspectives of families, teachers, social workers and facilitators who may be involved in conducting the activities, are also taken into account.

Data collection is based on the use of mixed methods: questionnaires, video and audio recordings of school activities, focus groups and interviews with children, teachers, educators, social workers and mediators.

Through the analysis of dialogue practices, the project aims to provide tools for schools and teachers, including (1) guidelines for dialogue activities in schools; (2) paper and online training opportunities for teachers and other professionals; (3) a self-assessment package for the activities.

OBSTACLES

Starting from February 2020, the Covid-19 outbreak has impacted on the project. In all partner countries education activities were suspended or had undergone some changes, therefore research projects were postponed, cancelled or frozen in many schools. Face to face contacts were no more allowed as freely as before. This has led the research teams to find, where possible, new and creative solutions in order to continue the research. In particular, many of the WP5 (Qualitative analysis) activities were and are still being realized remotely. For what concerns WP6 (Evaluative analysis of the activities), the first obstacle was to ensure the collaboration of teachers and principals whose first concern has become guaranteeing security and the achievement of educational goals. Fortunately, most of them are still aware of the relevance of promoting children participation in educational contexts, especially in this historical time, where children have less chance to interact together. This need is even more urgent if we consider that children with a migration background experience huge challenges in communicating by being on a remote mode and not physically present in the same class.

The second obstacle in the work for WP6 is gain access to schools, since even in situations in which they remained open, access for external experts is often not allowed. Therefore, given the situation, most of the WP6 research activities are conducted virtually as well. Nevertheless, some schools are not equipped to allow remote activities, therefore some problems in achieving the goals for WP6 still exists for some partners.

FINALISED WORK PACKAGES

Two WPs were fully completed before the Covid-19 outbreak: WP3 (Report on legislation and Report on best practices) and WP4 (Report on the analysis of quantitative data)¹



The work on WP3 provided an overview of migrant children's wellbeing, protection and education as well as a comparative investigation of the legislation in partner countries that most deeply impacts young migrants and their families. The research focuses on policies and practices of integration, migrant children's access to basic services, their enrollment in school, and the differences that exist for children of different migratory statuses. This two-part report includes data on recent migration flows of children to Europe and to the specific countries of the partners. It also gathered information on how children arrived and it offers an assessment of wellbeing of migrant children and their families as evaluated through available data on access to healthcare services, housing, employment, and the time children have spent out of school. Specifically, the Report on best practices offers an analysis of the school systems, obstacles, and opportunities that migrant children and their families encounter in local contexts in the countries involved

in CHILD UP – Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Each partner was asked to highlight best practices in terms of programming to support children in their integration in school. and common themes from the programmes were identified such as programmes that helped to combat discrimination; training for teachers to work with migrant background children; one-to-one mentoring; initiatives that encouraged cross-cultural understanding/sharing; and funding that targeted the achievement gap.

Quantitative data collected in WP4 provided insights on condition and hybrid integration of children with migrant background into education. The target group of migrant-background children included (1) first- and second-generation long-term resident children, (2) newcomers, including refugees and children recently arrived through family reunification, (3) unaccompanied children, who can be both long-term residents and newcomers.

The overall aim of the survey was to collect quantitative data and analyse it in order to answer questions related to migrant children's integration. Migrant children were identified through a question about the origin of their parents and their place of birth. There are two reasons for this procedure. First, and above all, this type of sampling allows for the comparison of levels of integration of migrant-background children and national children, as it is important to compare data from migrant and non-migrant children and parents. Second, it avoids the possible labelling of migrant children as selected for research activities.

The collected data help to describe the variety of life situations of migrant-background children and the different aspects that are essential for integration. WP4 report concerns three important aspects related to migrant-background children's social life: 1) children's social life is based on contextual conditions, such as gender, sexual orientation,

geography, age, abilities and status (intersectionality); 2) migrant-background children can contribute to the host society and to their own integration. This implies focusing on children's agency as a specific form of participation, based on the choices of action that are available to children in terms of promoting change, in particular in school life; 3) cultural identity is a contingent product of social negotiation. This negotiation can produce hybrid identities, i.e. loose, unstable manifestations of cultural identities, and hybrid integration.

Currently, besides planning and realizing research activities for WP6 and WP5 children focus groups, the team is implementing the analysis of WP5 interviews with professionals, teachers, social workers and mediators, realized in the past months.



WHY IS MY PARTICIPATION AS A SCHOOL HEAD, TEACHER, PARENT, STUDENT, RESEARCHER OR POLICY MAKER NEEDED?

In these testing times of COVID-19 combined with mass immigration around the world and in particular in Europe, integration and inclusion of migrant children is a subject that touches us all whether we are pupils, parents, family members, teachers, school staff or school heads. Therefore in case you are interested in lending your support to the CHILD-UP, we invite all school leaders and educators to consult www.child-up.eu regularly for events, articles, newsletters, good practices, school resources and tools, training modules and manuals. and/or to contact local partners directly. Details of Child-Up partners can be found here: <http://www.child-up.eu/partnership/>.

We hope that you will participate actively and share your opinions on the CHILD-UP social media accounts on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). ■

Notes

1 Full reports can be found here <http://www.child-up.eu/project-outcomes/>

An open school...
to concrete
problems,
to experiences
of cooperation,
to self-reflection
tools

The Erasmus+ Reflecting for Change project
at #ErasmusDays 2020

ROSSELLA PARENTE

#ERASMUSDAYS 2020: IN THE WORLD, IN ITALY

Three days of celebration of the Erasmus+ Programme in Europe and beyond during the #ErasmusDays. A precious opportunity to organize an event, share Erasmus+ experience and spread the word about the Erasmus+ projects.



The ErasmusDays map for a very special journey: from Finland to Mauritius, from Mexico to the Philippines, it crosses all of Europe, and beyond, far and wide and reflects the international dimension that characterizes the various actions of the program. The map is dotted with over 4,600 flags, one for each event scheduled for 15-16-17 October 2020 in 67 different countries. Writes Valentina Riboldi of the Italian National Agency Erasmus+ Indire who has worked to better manage the Program, waiting for the new Erasmus 2021-2027 which is already upon us. These three days of the event were characterized by a desire to share experiences, past or in progress, thanks to Erasmus+ projects;

to give inspiration, testimony to an idea of Europe that finds richness in differences; to emphasize the importance of European funding in the field of education.

In this 4th edition of the #ErasmusDays 300 events in Italy have been exceeded! The Italian Erasmus Community, which has always participated enthusiastically in this initiative, is made up of pupils, students, teachers, educators, researchers, professors, volunteers and representatives of organizations, associations, NGOs and museums. Despite the very difficult times caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, throughout the Italian territory schools, universities and organizations have shown a strong European sentiment and the desire to continue to collaborate, meet, live and share experiences and results.

Webinars, games, round tables, contests, storytelling but also presentations of new Erasmus projects or Erasmus stand set-ups: these are some of the activities proposed in these three days. From the schools comes the largest number of events for #ErasmusDays. Schools that are able to meet and work together with creativity and skills, including digital ones developed with Erasmus+, bridging the distance from partner schools in other countries.

PARTICIPATION OF THE R4C PROJECT IN THE #ERASMUSDAYS 2020

After the suspension in Italy of educational activities in almost all schools and the activation of distance learning, due to the CoVID-19 pandemic, this webinar “An Open School... to concrete problems, to experiences of cooperation, to self-reflection tools“ was created for sharing and reflection on possible effective activities and tools for evaluation of digital practices and strategies. The webinar was presented by Città della Scienza of Naples with the Ellinogermaniky Agogi of Athene, the Institute for Didactic Technologies of the National Council of Research of Genoa,



and the Istituto Superiore Santorre of Santarosa of Turin. The purpose? To promote the Open Schooling approach and the use of self-reflection tools. The meeting focuses on the R4C – Reflecting for Change project, an Erasmus+ project that promotes the use of self-reflection tools as a vehicle to support sustainable innovation in schools linked to the effective use of new technologies.

Reflecting for Change (R4C) aims is to propose an advanced support framework, as well as a set of core policy recommendations, to schools seeking to introduce a type of holistic change that will ensure a meaningful uptake of sustainable innovation. Said Flora Di Martino (Città della Scienza) during the webinar underlining the emphasis that the project give on achieving improved learning outcomes as set by the Europe 2020 strategy. She continued saying that the aim of the project, that will end in October 2021, is promoting the use of self-reflection tools to support innovation and systemic change in schools.

Nikos Zygouritas (Ellinogermaniki Agogi) then intervened speaking about the Open School Self Reflection Tool (SRT) used in R4C. He pointed out that the goal of the questionnaire that it identifies the real needs of school for building the future. He explored how schools may move from self-reflection to developing a comprehensive plan of action that utilizes the results of a self-evaluation exercise, but, crucially, in combination with fundamental principles and mechanisms of European educational policy for schools. The intervention has been very topical because it provides teachers with a tool to identify the true needs of their school, in this period of great change of the school that has passed from lessons in presence to lessons at distance. This passage does not only mean a different tool through which teaching passes but it requires a revision of the topics, of the methodological approaches, of scholastic time.

In R4C approach, innovation is also understood in terms of a school's pathway to digital maturity (e-maturity) and its comprehensive relationship to the use of ICT. The R4C project therefore also promotes the use of SELFIE (Self-reflection on Effective Learning by Fostering the use of Innovative Educational Technologies) which is a tool designed on behalf of the European Commission to help schools embed digital technologies into teaching, learning and student assessment. Stefania Bocconi (ITD – CNR) illustrated that SELFIE can highlight what's working well in the school, where improvement is needed, and what the priorities should be. The tool is currently available in the 24 official languages of the European Union. The SELFIE tool generates a report, a snapshot, a "SELFIE", that helps to understand what the situation is and, on this basis, to draw up an action plan.

And to close this overview of the tools deployed by the R4C project, Maria Zambrotta (Istituto Superiore Santarosa) illustrated a good practice, an experience made with her students. Experience that began during the OSOS – Open Schools for Open Societies project and is being

perfected in R4C. She told us about a cooperation experience between her school and local companies that has increased her students' interest in science. Educational project that has also been recognized by the Turin Chamber of Commerce, Storie di Alternanza award.

AT THE TIME OF DISTANCE LEARNING, A BEST PRACTICE FROM R4C

In this period afflicted by the COVID-19, the use of distance learning is intense: the time that was previously lived by our young people in the classroom, paying attention to the teacher or books, is now spent in front of a computer or a tablet. And moreover, our youth also spend much of their free time, already before the pandemic, with their smartphone. Smartphone which is certainly a very powerful and very useful tool, indispensable by now for all of us, but it is equally sure that its prolonged use is damaging. It is damaging, among other things, also due to the infamous blue light it emits. Blue light that can be investigated with free apps and the availability of two digital devices: one for investigating, the other one the object of the investigation.

So let's take a step back for a closer look at what was the speech that opened the webinar. In this speech I (Rossella Parente – Città della Scienza) asked those who followed the webinar if the screen of the digital device from which they were connected was adequately lit or was it too dark or too bright. And I continued explaining that from the smartphone we certainly have a light intensity adequate to that of the environment, from the computer usually not, because in smartphones, in all tablets and in many new laptops there is a sensor that automatically adjusts the brightness of the screen. The brightness sensor adjusts the brightness of the screen to that of the surrounding environment, and therefore to the opening of the pupil of our eyes: the screen is very bright in bright environments, it is dark in darker environments.



The same sensor can be used for quantitative measurements of illumination of the surrounding environment using an app. There are many apps free downloadable ones (Lux Light Meter, Lumu Light Meter, Lux Meter) that measure the illuminance. You place your smartphone on the floor if you are in a passageway, corridor or stairway, on the table if you are at a workstation, and open the app which immediately provides the expected value. In our rooms, the lighting is usually between 150 and 800 lux. At this point you may be wondering what these numbers mean or what can we do with them. How bright, at minimum, room or a workstation must be is defined by the European standard UNI EN 12464 – 1 “Light and lighting – Lighting of work places”. The same legislation also defines the lighting values in school buildings. For example, in school classrooms we must have at minimum 300 lux on the desk, on the blackboard as in some laboratories 500 lux, while in the corridors (passageways) 100 lux. So, with a smartphone our students can conduct a survey on the adequacy of lighting in their school buildings and draw up an adaptation project for an efficient energy plan.

But our students one more time used smartphones... even though for carrying out this investigation! So, let's go back to the speech that we have done initially about paying attention to how much blue light is emitted by our digital devices. With the Color Comparator app, always free to download, it is possible to measure the intensity of RGB (Red Green Blue) components in which it is always possible to decompose a beam of light of any color. To measure how much blue light my mobile phone emits and compare it with that emitted by another smartphone model or another digital device, I need to have the same image on the screen. If I want to compare how much blue light my phone emits compared to that emitted by my friend's phone, I can't do it, for example, if I have a photo taken at the sea and my friend have a sunset over the desert dunes. So, I can either take the measurement with the same photo or download the free Physics Toolbox Color Generator app that makes the screen in a one color (of my choice). I point the light emitted from the mobile phone screen on a white sheet or panel and with a second phone with the Color Comparator app I measure the reflected light. At this point the game is done and I can compare the numerical values of the intensity of blue light emitted by the different models or devices. And then I can observe, for example, that OLED screens emit less blue light than LCDs – up to a third less!

So we can consciously choose screens with a lower blue light emission because we know that blue light alters the circadian cycle, that of wakefulness and sleep, worsening the quality of the night's rest of our youth people. Youth people who we know that they, too often, go to sleep at the small hours and they wake up late in the morning. Furthermore, studies, at moment with disagree outcomes, on possible damage to the retina, to the rods, from blue light emitted by digital devices are still underway.

Therefore, starting from the observation of the brightness of the screen

of an object dear to the students, it's possible to carry out investigations with the scientific method, study the optics, make measurements and process data, compare the values with parameters defined in a European, design a school lighting efficiency project, identify which digital devices emit the least blue light to preserve our health.

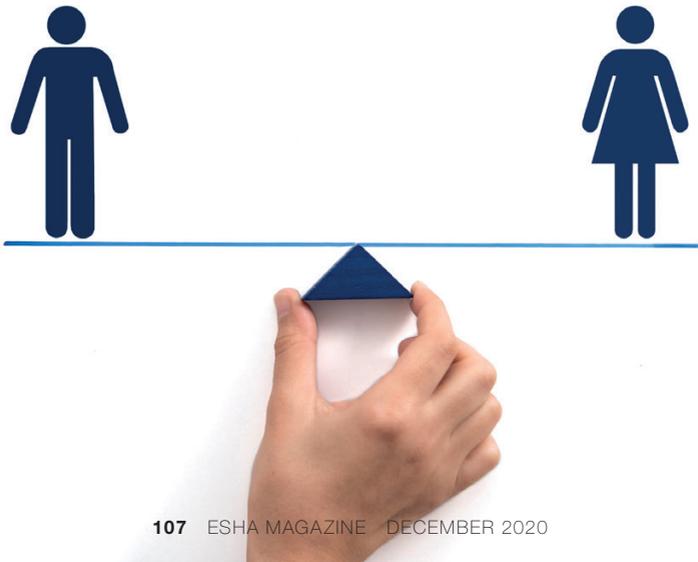
We therefore used the Inquire-Based Science Education – IBSE in this scientific survey because there were so many questions we asked ourselves, looking for answers also with practical experiences. We started observing some smartphone simple behaviors but then we investigated the brightness of the work environments, the color rendering. We then tackled the Project-Based Learning – PBL that is the active exploration of the challenges and problems of the real world, a methodology through which students are believed to acquire deepest knowledges. We were in STEAM-based active learning approach: Science (optics) Technology (smartphone) Engineering (LCD and OLED screens) Art (Color synthesis) Math (data processing). And finally we also involved the Responsible Research and Innovation – RRI principles talking about the efficiency of the lighting of the school building, the different blue light emission of digital devices, our health. All these approaches are indicated in the Open School model, in the good practices of the R4C – Reflecting for Change project ■

For more information, please write me:

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Gender Equality Matters

The objectives of GEM are to raise awareness, change attitudes and to promote behavioural changes and aims to tackle gender stereotyping, gender-based bullying and gender-based violence. The target groups are school-aged children, parents, teachers and school heads.



The GEM-partnership is between Dublin City University (DCU – Ireland), Social Action and Innovation Center (KMOP – Greece), Research Group in Educational Technology/University of Murcia (GITE – Spain) and Fondazione Mondo Digitale (FMD – Italy) and the European School Heads Association (ESHA).

Due to the corona-virus GEM was granted a 6-month extension and the project now ends in February 2021. With that being said, the project has been ongoing and over the past few months interesting initiatives were undertaken by our partners. More exciting initiatives are still to follow. Lesson materials for primary and secondary education, training materials for teachers, parents and trainers, the MOOC, train the trainer materials are now being tested in various countries. Please feel free to have a look at all free materials that have been uploaded onto the GEM website, as they are of great interest to parents, pupils, teachers and school heads that are interested in gender equality and preventing gender-based violence in their schools.



NEWS FROM DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY (DCU)

Dr. Seline Keating delivered a paper presentation at the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) conference on the 4th of September 2020. It took place through the online platform of Zoom. The conference theme was Opening Education: Options, Obstacles and Opportunities. The keynote address was delivered by Professor Anne Looney from DCU Institute of Education. Seline's presentation was titled "Gender Equality Matters (GEM): The Opportunities, Obstacles and Challenges of Tackling Gender Stereotyping, Gender-based Bullying and Gender-based Violence in Irish Primary Schools."

The GEM team from DCU and UM collaborated to present a paper at the European Educational Research Association (EERA) in Glasgow, Scotland August 2020. The conference theme was Educational Research (Re) Connecting Communities. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 this conference was cancelled for 2020.

The Gender Equality Matters Classroom Materials were launched by Dr Mary McAleese, former President of Ireland, and Dr Martin McAleese, Chancellor, Dublin City University by means of an online fireside chat, moderated by Maureen King of ABC (The National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre (Dublin City University), on Monday November 30th 2020 at 4.00 pm.

NEWS FROM UNIVERSITY OF MURCIA

Over the next few months the training in gender equality of different groups will begin led by [group of research of Educational Technology](#) at the University of Murcia.

First, parent training will take place and subsequently the training of trainers will be implemented. Both trainings will be carried out virtually through the project's website: <https://www.genderequalitymatters.eu/>

In addition, several of our publications are already available. These Spanish publications can be viewed here: A [systematic review about gender equality and ICT in the context of formal education](#); a [primary teacher training to promote gender equality](#) and one educational experience of one of the teachers participating in GEM.

NEWS FROM FONDAZIONE MONDO DIGITALE (FMD)

From June 21st 2020 FMD participated in #STEMintheCity, the initiative promoted by the Milan Council in collaboration with important public and private organisations and the support of the United Nations, to promote STEM subjects and overcome cultural stereotypes keeping young women out of scientific and technological fields.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, #STEMintheCity was transformed into a completely digital, open and inclusive, project that will accompany us to the 2021 edition. A rich platform of events, educational webinars, news, testimonials and articles will stimulate young men and women to improve their digital skills and undertake STEM studies and careers, overcoming gender stereotypes. Among them, the training path related to discrimination, bullying and gender based violence and 11 video lessons developed by experts for GEM – Gender Equality Matters.

NEWS FROM SOCIAL ACTION AND INNOVATION CENTER (KMOP-GREECE)

In Greece GEM is implemented by two NGOs, KMOP, in collaboration with the Rainbow School. The GEM for Greece include a series of experiential workshops for active learning and are oriented towards both primary and secondary education. Furthermore, for the purpose of training educators, an online distance learning platform (MOOC) was constructed. In the present work our aim focuses on the one hand on the presentation of this project, the analysis of its thematic units and methodology on which it is being based, but also on the other hand on

referring to and critically commenting on weaknesses on behalf of IEP (Greek Institute for Educational Policy), as they were presented during the procedure of approving the project for implementation in primary school units.

Gender equality and the elimination of gender-based violence have been on the Greek political agenda for many decades. The Constitution of 1975 states that Greek men and women are equal before the law and have equal rights and obligations. However, despite lively interest in issues of gender and sexuality, gender is however approached mainly from the male/female prospective, emphasizing its biological, strictly dualistic and regulatory aspect. Thus, programs that discuss gender in a biological spectrum taking into account the experience of intersex people, but also programs that deal with gender and gender expression, taking into account the experience of transgender people do not easily find a place in the Greek educational reality.

The classroom implementation of GEM was initially approved by the Greek Ministry of Education in July 2019. Despite this initial approval Greek teachers were unable to implement, as two main factors obstructed implementation in classrooms for the school year 2019-2020. The change of government in July 2019 and the announcement of new members for the board of directors of the IEP (the organization of the Greek Ministry of Education responsible for the evaluation and approval of educational materials and programs). The new administration demanded for some programs, including GEM, to go through a re-submission and re-evaluation process. The approval was renewed in February 2020, three weeks before the total lockdown due to Covid-19.

Interestingly, in the new approval, specific changes and modifications for the GEM program were proposed. Namely, any reference to gender and sexual minorities (LGBTI) has been deleted both in the introductory

note of the needs' assessment questionnaires and in the content of the questionnaires.

This trend of censorship and elimination of LGBTI references for GEM, which was observed for other inclusive sexuality and gender education programs as well, highlights a conservative attitude of the Ministry of Education that does not align with contemporary needs for inclusive, fair, awareness-based, human rights-based education as promoted by EU.

NEWS FROM EUROPEAN SCHOOL HEADS ASSOCIATION (ESHA)

ESHA organised a train the trainer event for teachers and school leaders from the Netherlands and Hungary in Utrecht on 27-29 September 2020. The topic was Training in Gender Equality Lesson Materials. We focused on inclusion of GEM materials in general as well as specific aspects of child participation and parental engagement in gender



equality and most importantly the inner journey of teachers and school leaders representing close to 100 schools with well over half a million pupils, that influence their inclusion practices and attitudes in terms of gender quality.

The training was based on an experimental learning methodology. We tackled various elements from the inner diversity of teachers to legislative frameworks for schools with a special focus on the meaningful participation of children regardless of their age and background as well as the engagement of parents in matters of gender equality. The event was interspersed with an interesting series of activities and workshops focusing on gender equality. Participants of the training pledged to improve the inclusiveness of their schools after the training ended. Based on participant feedback it was very well received.

Why is my participation as a school head, teacher, parent, student or related professional needed?

Gender Equality is a subject that touches us all whether we are pupils, parents, family members, teachers, school staff or school heads. Therefore in case you are interested in lending your support to the GEM cause, we invite all school leaders, educators, parents and pupils to consult <https://www.esha.org/eshaprojects/> and www.genderequalitymatters.eu and to contact local GEM partners directly. Please consult <https://www.genderequalitymatters.eu/partners/> for partner details.

We hope that you will participate actively and share your opinions on the GEM social media accounts on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

The content of this publication represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

‘Here, at Vivona High School, we do this way’

An open Future without Borders

What is the world without youth, their hopes and dreams? Young people finding their place is what we care the most. We are teachers and as such we do not only work at school, we live it, we share, we imagine.





The whole world, Europe, Rome, is the reality we live in; and Rome is an ancient and modern city as well, where places of the past are found in the present and the differences we experience between them are the greatest richness we can rely on.

EUROPE AS A LIVING SUBJECT

For some years now, Francesco Vivona High School is a European Ambassador School and as we focus our syllabus on classical studies, we have been combining the rigorous practice of Classics with citizenship values through projects from the European Parliament and the European Commission, because we are certain that citizenship practice takes place first and foremost in the school, but it is not confined within the school walls, rather it involves students and families, opening up to the whole society. With this in mind, Vivona High School has reached its fourth edition of the “Europe Day”.



This year, not even the Covid emergency could stop our students and the 9 May 2020 celebrations were hosted in a virtual space, on the home page of the school website, www.liceovivona.edu.it. A gift image door invited to enter “Europe”, the conference was proposed on a web page as we had thought of it in presence, then with a journalist, Francesco Giorgino who moderated the interventions, institutional representatives (Hon. Rondinelli, Borrelli, Longo, the Deputy Minister Serena Lalli), people from the world of schools and universities, members of culture and journalism, school managers, Italian and foreign teachers made their contribution.

THINKING GLOBALLY IN A WORLD SYSTEM

The title of the event was “Europe beyond Europe”. At the center of the page the flag of Europe waved among those of all the countries with which Vivona High School has been activating partnerships and collaborations for years. By clicking on the flags you could explore all the activities and projects that students have carried out, or in which they have participated – at European institutions and / or with their international partners. You could also link the previous editions posters. The page closed with two videos that represent the deepest spirit of the event; in the first one, the students of the Vivona theater workshop led by the Theatre Master Mrs Mariotti, tell their lockdown experience in images; in the second one, the Vivona Choir directed by Maestro Marilena Lopercolo proposes an “Over the rainbow” version recorded in “remote mode” which was ment as a contribution to hope and confidence in returning to normality. The active participation of around 500 students from the first to the fifth year was encouraged in an interdisciplinary way, enhancing languages and the use of ICT, (Padlet for direct interaction between pupils and for exchange of ideas and opinions; google drive folder for sharing materials; Meet for organizational video-conferencing; Photopeach, movie maker for video creation; other apps for collaborative and sharing works) offering a practical experience of

democracy at school with the aim of developing the individual ability to commit to one another.

SUPPORTING AND PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES

To embrace the values of international cooperation, Vivona students created a “robot in covid time” able to help sick people also from an emotional point of view, with hugs and video calls to loved ones. With this project, the working group of Vivona High School won the 2019-2020 edition of STEM4future, the best on national level, on 29 May 2020. Given the success of the experiment and the enthusiasm with which the students lived it, we are planning to share the methodologies and the results with the schools communities Vivona High School is linked to with long and lasting relationships and collaboration. However the most important result was working on the path of solidarity, thinking of other people.





Ambassador School Programme

Raise students' awareness about their European citizenship



PARLAMENTO EUROPEO
SCUOLA AMBASCIATRICE

Your Europe! Your Say! Over the Youth!



New Generation Parliamentary works simulation programme



Erasmus Plus is the European Union program for education, training, sport, and youth

WHAT NEXT

‘Happiness is the fruit of freedom, but freedom is the fruit of value’.

Each student has grown as a very versatile man, confident in himself and we are ready to carry out other projects next year to enhance and strengthen the relationship between Europe and young people and we hope to be able to actively participate in the upcoming celebrations during the new school year. Providing the tools for facing any situation is the reason why our school is open to the whole world and we are always truly open to new challenges. ■

The article was written with Giovanna Aruta internationalization projects officer, Patrizia Boretti public relations officer and Claudia Corbello, European relations officer.

The UPPER Project

Education role in developing peace and transforming education –The UPPER Project – final event generates new ideas for synergy among diverse approaches to peace and citizenship in education.



CONFERENCE

On Friday 27th November 2020 the final conference of the UPPER project (systemic UPscaling of Peace Education pRactices, ERASMUS+ Programme) took place in a virtual form with over 75 participants representing 12 countries and different education stakeholders. The project is coordinated by FREREF and involves, as partners, ESHA, the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in Sanremo (the main organiser of the event), the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia and the Maltese Ministry of Education. After the institutional greeting session, a keynote address by Prof. Anne Bamford, representing the City of London, pointed out the power of peace as a strategy for systemic educational change, within and beyond the school environment; then Brikena Xomaqi, Director of the European Lifelong Learning Platform, has appreciated the openness of the project to support collaboration with other networks' initiatives in the related field of citizenship education, and Auréa Cophignon, Nice City Delegate representing the City Mayor Christian Estrosi, expressed full support to the longterm mission of the project and its contribution in avoiding the diffusion of violent extremism, such as the one that has recently hit Nice and Paris in particular.



As already mentioned in previous issues of this newsletter, UPPER has collected and analysed international good practices in peace education, developed a competence framework for educators willing to improve their effectiveness in this domain and several other self-assessment and benchmarking tools as well as a handbook for schools committed

in this domain. All these outputs were quickly presented (for more information visit the website <https://eiplab.eu>) in the plenary session, then the current development of the Education Inspiring Peace Lab, the most important spin-off and sustainability instrument of the UPPER results, was illustrated. The mission of the EIP Lab is to help education systems to re-focus on personal and social competences, useful for life, active citizenship and work after many years of exaggerated focus on employability and labour market requirements, a focus that, by the way, has not created such impressive results. Since the Paris Declaration of 2015 the need to invest more attention, time and effort on peace and citizenship in formal and informal education has slowly become a policy objective for the European Institutions and OECD, following UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The EIP Lab has also the objective of reducing the huge fragmentation that characterises the initiatives in this field, with the motto “from Silos to Hub” and has launched a new project – starting in December 2020- to renew the analysis of recent (post Paris Declaration of 2015) policies in the field of Citizenship Education (CITIZED).

After the EIP Lab progress review the conference was organised in five breakout sessions, simulating the dynamics of the Lab and formulating 15 proposals for new initiatives and projects.



ROUND TABLE

The final round table allowed to explore further collaboration opportunities: Prof. Claudio Baraldi of UNIMORE in particular mentioned joint initiatives with the RUNIPACE (recently created network of Italian Universities for Peace) and articulated the design principles of an

effective dialogue practice for education systems; Euan Mackie, Peace Educator and representative of ESHA, promoted the concept of School Peace Gardens in which formal and informal education might collaborate in new forms; this idea was then supported also by Lucija Karnelutti, representing OBESSU, the secondary schools students network. Elisa Briga (Head of Advocacy at EFIL – European Federation for Intercultural Learning) presented other projects developing intercultural competences, and supported the idea of a new federative effort, arguing that policy conditions seem to become as favourable as never before to global citizenship and peace education. Finally, Prof. Alberto Melloni, recently appointed Member of the European Commission Group of Chief Scientific Advisors (GCSA), stressed the need of clarifying the somehow confused terminology used in this domain and addressed the problem of growing religious illiteracy in Europe, and the need to represent the positive elements existing in “other” faiths rather than pointing to differences and giving mainly negative representations. This would significantly contribute, in his view, to peace education.

EUAN MACKIE, PEACE EDUCATOR

Euan Mackie, former Head Teacher, Educational Coach, Scotland, United Kingdom, and Peace Educator, Service Civil International, stated the following:

“Peace Education is about creating a culture within an educational institution which grows a sense of collaboration and understanding of each other, at all levels. Behind the vision, are many varying strategies which are based on valuing individuals, of teamwork, and addressing prejudice, the stereotyping and alienation of others. Young people grow and learn more about their personal value, and how to live together through the experience of interacting with others, not by studying at home or in classrooms. Experiencing what is unique about themselves is important, and how others see them. Learning that others have different opinions

and working with misunderstandings is a necessary element in building out tolerance and self-value. Mediation of differences then is an important tool in resolving and understanding conflicts.”



As one strategy of personal development and Peace Education, Euan highlighted the transformative power of mixed background ‘pastoral’ groups within educational institutions and outside through non-formal education and youth organisations. These are diverse membership groups who come together, voluntarily, for study, for creativity, for service or for a therapeutic reason. The creation of a Peace Garden as in a school in Malta is one such project, but there are many more of different purposes. An essential feature of such groups is having collective acceptance of responsibility for each other in safety and well-being.

These group experiences grow personal maturity through a stronger sense of contribution of self-identity, but not egotism, and relationship to others of diverse backgrounds in age, gender, ethnicity, and disposition. Diversity is therefore an asset to value.

Peace Educators accept that tensions and perceptions of difference are natural features of daily life. Our practice starts with the seed corn experiences of young people of themselves and others to live, learn and work together.

We are looking forward to the publishing of Euan Mackie’s book, titled Promoting the Personal Development of Young People (Education using

positive psychology, and therapeutic approaches), which is projected to publish in Spring 2021 by the publishing house, Bassman Books.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Project Lead FREREF proposed the following recommendation:

General Recommendations applicable at all levels, from daily practice to macro-policy level

- Value of diversity;
- Well-being of learners;
- Whole-school approach and dialogue with communities;
- Teaching of controversies and different perspectives;
- Dialogue and conflict transformation;
- Attention to individual specificity;



Recommendations specifically related to teachers' policies, at National and EU level

- Civic and Peace Education competences;
- Continuous professional development of teachers;
- Dissemination of available learning resources, self-assessment tools and good practices;
- More diversity in recruitment of teachers;

Recommendations for EU Institutions and EU Policies/ Programmes

- Make the teaching and valorisation of Civic Competences a priority in EU strategies;

- Support schools according to their needs and strategy;
- Collaboration with the Council of Europe;
- Collaborate under the “Youth Partnership” joint initiative.

Why is my participation as a school head, teacher, parent, student or policymaker needed?

In these times of mass immigration around the world and in particular in Europe, Peace Education is a subject that touches us all whether we are pupils, parents, family members, teachers, school staff or school heads. Therefore in case you are interested in lending your support to the UPPER, we invite all school leaders and educators to consult www.eiplab.eu regularly for events, articles, newsletters, good practices, school resources and tools, training modules and manuals. and/or to contact local GEM partners (<https://www.genderequalitymatters.eu/partners/>) directly.

The content of this publication represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains. ■

Next issue OF THE ESHA MAGAZINE will be out in **March 2021**.

The deadline for submitting an article for the next issue is
Friday 26 February 2021.

Do you have interesting success stories?

A perfect programme?

Good experiences with the job shadowing project?

Liked a seminar you attended?

Have found a great solution everyone should know off?

Did you do research and found something great?

Found knowledge you have to share?

Found out something great?

An answer to all our questions?

Do you have an upcoming event you want everyone to know?

Something that shouldn't be missed?

A thing you have to go to?

A date which no one should forget?

Or do you want to read something about a certain theme?

Children's diversity

Coaching and mentoring school leaders

Hybrid integration

Inclusion

Social innovation

....

Please contact (luca.laszlo@esha.org) us so we can make great
next issues of the ESHA magazine for you!



European School
Heads Association